May 2020

Dearest Friends,

Ruth Flower, longtime Quaker advocate for Native concerns, reminds us that people have the power to bend the arc of history toward justice. This May, as we recognize the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Native Women and Girls, stand with us in faith to bend the arc of history. 

Congress has funded victim services in COVID-19 relief efforts, but Native Americans have essentially been left out. As a matter of equity and justice, Congress must also fund tribal victim services in the next relief package.

With stay-at-home orders in place for many states and tribes, domestic violence rates are increasing. This is especially problematic for Indian Country. Data collected before the pandemic showed 84 percent of Native women reported experiencing violence in their lifetimes. This crisis gives new urgency for Congress to act.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has created a dangerous situation for those sheltering at home with an abuser,” writes Kerri Colfer, FCNL’s advocate for Native American policy. “This problem is especially pronounced in Indian Country, where housing is limited and often overcrowded. Due to limited funding, many shelters and victim services programs are struggling to stay open.”

The largest COVID-19 stimulus package, the CARES Act (H.R. 748), did include funding for domestic violence programs. It did not, however, fund programs authorized under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), including essential tribal victim services. This oversight could endanger Native women who already experience high rates of domestic violence.

As Friends, we call on Congress to include funding for victim services for tribes in the next COVID-19 stimulus package. Furthermore, legislators should give tribes maximum flexibility and discretion in using the funding.

Please act using the accompanying call script, letter template, and/or this email form. When you write your letter or email, please add a personal note of 2-4 sentences letting your member know why you are concerned. Then, call the U.S. Congress at 202-224-3121 to be connected to your representative’s and senators’ offices. Leave a message if they do not pick up or if you are calling after office hours.

This month and until the pandemic disruptions are resolved, we will send Letter Writing prompts only by email. Although not gathered in person, we ask Friends to continue sending letters and emails and calling elected officials using the materials we provide. Please consider sharing this call to action with your community list-servs and in organizing virtual gatherings for collective advocacy. To learn how to lobby Congress from home with FCNL, read our new guide on virtual lobbying or fill out this form indicating your interest and a staff member will reach out to you soon.

Ever faithfully onwards,
Bobby Trice
Program Assistant for Quaker Outreach
rtrice@fcnl.org

PS. To learn more about how COVID-19 is impacting Indian Country, watch FCNL’s Virtual Lobby Training on VAWA and Thursdays with Friends Episode 3 featuring Diane Randall and Kerri Colfer discussing Native American concerns.

Call Script

Hello, I am calling for Representative/Senator ______________________. I am a resident in [city, state] in district [number]. I urge you to include funding for victim services for tribes in the next COVID-19 stimulus package. Tribes are seeing an escalation in domestic violence and sexual assault cases due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Stay-at-home orders, the economic downturn, and a lack of available resources are exacerbating the already high rates of violence against Native people.

(My story)

As you make additional funding decisions in response to the pandemic, please prioritize the needs of Indian Country and the victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Letter/Email Template

May 2020

Dear ______________________

The statistics of missing and murdered Indigenous women are staggering - with 84 percent of Native women experiencing violence in their lifetimes and a murder rate 10 times the national average, this epidemic can no longer be ignored. With stay at home orders in place in many states and tribes, rates of violence in Indian Country are likely to skyrocket.

I urge Congress to assist Indian Country amid this pandemic. Please include funding for victim services for tribes in the next COVID-19 stimulus package and give tribes maximum flexibility and discretion in using the funding.

(My story)

As you make additional funding decisions in response to the pandemic, please prioritize the needs of Indian Country and the victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Sincerely,
(Name, Physical Address, Phone, Email)