

June 21, 2017

Representative

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science

House Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

With just over four months between now and the beginning of the next fiscal year, we expect that your committee will be moving quickly. We write to you about two funding issues: **tribal justice programs** and the **Census Bureau**.

We are faith groups with a commitment to the well-being of all of our neighbors. We are led not only by compassion, but also by a sense of justice, acknowledging the historic role of faith groups and others in restricting and inhibiting the cultural and economic cohesion of Indian nations here on this continent. We seek to heal our connections with Native people, and to bring a better balance to the relationship between the federal government and Native nations.

Tribal Justice Programs: Many of us worked hard to support the amendments to the Violence Against Women Act in 2013, which expanded and strengthened the role of tribal police and courts in domestic violence cases on tribal lands. Complex jurisdictional issues and scarce funding still hamper many tribal police agencies in their efforts to implement their new authorities. Domestic violence itself takes on a new aspect, as the opioid and methamphetamine epidemics increasingly take hold in Indian Country. Added to these challenges, the growing number of youth suicides in Indian Country speaks to a loss of hope and futures that trouble many youth who encounter tribal justice systems.

We are pleased to see that the President's budget proposal, in spite of the wide range of spending cuts in other areas, would preserve most of the funding for domestic violence programs. While the funding for the Tribal Special Domestic Violence Jurisdiction would be reduced from \$4 million to \$2.5 million, the proposal also includes a 5 percent set-aside from the Crime Victims Fund (which was not included in the FY 2017 appropriation).

A continued 7 percent set-aside for Justice Programs will carry on investments in tribal youth and in the availability and functions of tribal police and courts. In another appropriations area (Health and Human Services), we are pleased to see that the President has also proposed an increase in funding for the Native American set-aside from the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. These funds will work together toward solutions to troubling community problems.

We're also pleased to see that the Justice Department would be directed to support the Native Children's Commission described in the *Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Act*, which became law last fall. Many of our organizations supported that Act; it will help to define ways to coordinate federal laws and programs that impact the lives of Native children.

We ask you to protect and increase these investments, to continue supporting the progress made within the Justice Department to offer technical assistance, resource grants, tribal youth programs and domestic violence prevention and response efforts.

Census Bureau: The Census Bureau is preparing for the 2020 Census – or trying to do so. Historically, funding for each decennial census ramps up as preparations begin, with a steep incline in the last two years before the census is launched. Due to the series of continuing resolutions and similar appropriations vehicles in the last few years, the Census Bureau has not seen a significant increase recently. Now, with 2020 just two years away, the Census Bureau budget is nearly flat-lined in the Administration’s budget proposal. It would increase by only about \$27 million overall. For the Bureau to be adequately prepared for the census, the budget would need to increase this year by about \$300 million.

As people of faith, we are concerned about people who are undercounted year after year. Groups that are undercounted in the census have less access to federal funding and proportional representation. Native Americans are one of those groups. The Census Bureau has learned that it needs to use customized techniques to reach Native American households and to receive accurate results.

Due to tight funding, tests that were designed to improve the accuracy of the count on Native reservations have already been cancelled. The restricted budget in 2018 could cause the only remaining test to be cancelled and would likely result in no improvement in the faulty estimates of undercounted Native American populations.

It is important to all of us that the Census should yield an accurate reflection of the people living in this country... including historically undercounted populations. We ask you to review the patterns of “ramped up” funding typically allocated to the Census Bureau as a census year approaches, and to allocate sufficient amounts for the Bureau to prepare adequately for an accurate count.

With sincerity and hope,

Friends Committee on National Legislation
The Office of Social Justice of the Christian Reformed Church
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Franciscan Action Network
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness
Office of American Indian Alaska Native Ministries, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society