

April 11, 2025

The Honorable Douglas Burgum
Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240
via email: douglas_burgum@ios.doi.gov

Dear Secretary Burgum,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations serving Tribal Nations and Tribal citizens and communities, we write to follow up on our [initial letter](#) to you, and express our deep and sincere concern regarding reports that the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Budget Request will contain extreme cuts to Indian Affairs funding. Specifically, it has come to our attention that the Office of Management and Budget has passed back a FY 2026 budget proposal that would cut \$1.2 billion from the Indian Affairs budget, including a \$100 million cut to the Office of Justice Services (OJS) alone. This is absolutely unacceptable.

As you know, Tribal Nations have political, government-to-government relationships with the United States, and we prepaid with our lands and resources for the federal government's trust and treaty obligations which are carried out, in part, through a series of federal statutory mandates. Any Tribal program or federal funding delivered to Tribal Nations—including through Tribal Colleges and Universities, as well as Tribal organizations serving Tribal Nations—is provided in furtherance of the United States' trust and treaty obligations. The federal employees necessary for the functioning of Tribal programs and the disbursement of funds to Tribal Nations are also part of the trust and treaty obligations. These actions are not discretionary; they are legal obligations rooted in treaties, trust obligations, the U.S. Constitution, and federal statutes.

At the same time, Indian Country faces decades of chronic underfunding, especially for the essential services provided through the Indian Affairs budget, and Tribal Nations are already forced to operate without appropriate resources. The impacts of this failure to deliver upon federal promises are visible throughout Indian Country. By nearly every measure and indicator, Tribal Nations and our citizens face a lower quality of life than do others in the United States. The disruption of what little resources are flowing will only deepen the divide between Indian Country and the rest of America.

A proposed cut to OJS is particularly distressing, considering both this Administration's commitment to public safety through Operations Lady Justice and Spirit Return, as well as the persistent gap in funding for this critical governmental infrastructure. A recent Tribal Law and

Order Act Report to Congress for FY 2021¹ revealed that the estimated amount of funding needed to meet the Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) obligation for public safety and justice funding to Indian Country is \$3.5 billion—over one billion more than the entire current BIA budget. According to testimony provided to Congress by Indian Affairs in November of 2024, the federal government is only funding 13% of the full funding due—measured by DOI in terms of “need”—for public safety and justice programs.

We are not the cause of federal deficits, nor should federal savings be achieved to our detriment. In fact, the U.S. should prioritize payment on debt to Tribal Nations as its original creditors.

President Trump has long recognized Indian Country as a strong partner, and Tribal Nations are ready to work with the Trump Administration to pursue shared goals. However, proposing draconian cuts to the provision of trust and treaty obligations at Indian Affairs will do nothing to advance our mutual interests. Rather, it will serve to further undermine the sacred promises made by the United States to Tribal Nations.

As the Secretary of the Interior, we urge that you oppose the inclusion of these cuts in the President's Budget Request.

Sincerely,

Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI)
American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC)
California Tribal Chairpersons' Association (CTCA)
Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Association (GPTCA)
Indian Gaming Association (IGA)
Inter Tribal Association of Arizona (ITAA)
Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes (MAST)
National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC)
National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (NCAIED)
National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)
National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH)
National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)
National Indian Education Association (NIEA)
National Indian Health Board (NIHB)
National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC)
Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPAIHB)
Self-Governance Communication & Education Tribal Consortium (SGCETC)
United South & Eastern Tribes Sovereign Protection Fund (USET SPF)
United Tribes of Michigan (UTM)

¹ Bureau of Indian Affs. Off. of Just. Servs., *Report to the Congress on Spending, Staffing, and Estimated Funding Costs of Public Safety and Justice Programs in Indian Country, 2021 1* (2024), https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/media_document/2021_tloa_report_final_508_compliant.pdf.