

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 22, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

As lead sponsors of the legislation creating the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children (Public Law 114-244), we respectfully request your support in advancing this critical Commission by making the remaining presidential appointment and directing the U.S. Department of Justice to assist the Commission in beginning its important work.

The United States has a distinct legal, treaty, and trust responsibility to Indian tribes across the country. As part of this responsibility, the federal government must provide for the education, health, social welfare, and safety of Native children. Yet, Native children continue to be the most at-risk population in the country, confronting serious disparities in these areas. For Native children, suicide is the leading cause of death at more than two times the national rate. They suffer from staggering rates of victimization, experience the highest rate of poverty of any racial group in the nation, and are arrested at a rate of three times the national average. The graduation rate for Native high school students is only 50 percent compared to more than 75 percent for white students. These statistics illustrate just some of the significant disparities Native children face compared to their peers.

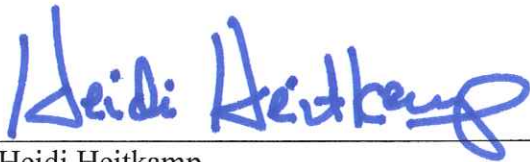
For too long, we have tried to address the issues affecting Native children by treating the symptoms rather than the cause. We cannot continue to do the same things we have always done and expect different results. Our efforts to create this Commission present a vital opportunity to identify new strategies for lasting solutions. The Commission will provide the much needed expertise, guidance, and cultural wisdom on how best to address the needs of Native children and uphold our nation's trust and treaty responsibilities.

To address these complex challenges, the Commission is charged with conducting a comprehensive study on the programs, grants, and support available to Native children and providing recommendations on improvements to maximize resources, create measurable goals, improve the lines of communication, and close longstanding gaps in available data about Native children. Too often, the needs of Indian tribes are not addressed because federal and state agencies and policies leave American Indians and Alaska Natives out of data collection and reporting efforts. Through this Commission, we have an opportunity to fill this gap in available data and shed light on where this country is failing our most vulnerable population.

This Commission is about the future of leadership with indigenous communities throughout the country and addressing the conditions in which their children are struggling to find a future. It is critically important for the Commission to begin studying the challenges facing Native children and make recommendations on how to ensure they receive the protections and tools they need to thrive.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We look forward to working with you to improve the lives of Native children.

Sincerely,



Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senate



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate



Betty McCollum
United States House of Representatives



Tom Cole
United States House of Representatives

Cc: The Honorable Jeff Sessions, Attorney General
The Honorable Ryan Zinke, Secretary of the Interior
The Honorable Betsy DeVos, Secretary of Education
The Honorable Tom Price, Secretary of Health and Human Services