

National Indian Health Board

June 29, 2009



Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) and Tribal Leaders from all across the country, I am writing to request your support for H.R. 2708 - *The Indian Health Care Improvement Act Amendments of 2009* (IHCIA). Attached is a letter signed by Tribal Leaders urging you to pass this reauthorization bill. In addition, we respectfully request your support for an amendment to H.R. 2708 to remove the "sunset" dates and permanently authorize the appropriation of funds to carry out the programs and services in the IHCIA.

In this era of reform, Indian Country needs assurance from Congress that the IHCIA will continue to direct how health care will be delivered to Indian people. For ten years, Tribal leaders, members and advocates have worked tirelessly with Congress to pass a modern IHCIA but our efforts have not been successful. Reauthorization is long over due – it is time to pass H.R. 2708 this year.

By making this law permanent, Congress would demonstrate that it is honoring its trust responsibility to Tribes regarding health care. Congress has established previously its commitment by making many other major Indian laws permanent such as the Snyder Act, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act and BIA education laws. It is now time to add the IHCIA to that list.

Making the IHCIA permanent would not prevent Congress from amending and revising the IHCIA. Both the Medicare and Medicaid laws – the cornerstones of Federal support for delivery of health care to elderly and low-income Americans – are permanent laws of the United States and are routinely subject to amendment. The law, which directs Federal supervision of health care delivery to American Indian and Alaska Natives, should have similar permanent status.

We look forward to working with you and members of the Congress on improving Indian health. If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact NIHB's Executive Director, Stacy A. Bohlen, or our Legislative Director, Jennifer Cooper at (202) 507-4070.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Reno Keoni Franklin'.

Reno Keoni Franklin
Chairman
National Indian Health Board