National Indian Health Board

June 28, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, H-232
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, H-204
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, S-221
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, S-230
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: NIHB Support of Advance Appropriations for the Indian Health Service

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McCarthy, and Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) and the 574+ federally recognized Tribes we serve, I write to reaffirm our support for including Advance Appropriations for Indian Health Service (IHS) in the FY 2023 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. NIHB stands with the National Congress of American Indians and Tribal and urban Indian health advocates across the nation in support of Mandatory and Full IHS funding and Advance Appropriations for the IHS as top priorities. Tribes stand firm in support of these objectives, and Indian Country has long supported the National IHS Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup's (TBFWG) request for Mandatory Funding, Full Needs Based Funding, and Advance Appropriations. We strongly urge you to ensure that the FY 2023 appropriations include IHS Advance Appropriations. Through your years of support of Tribes and the federal government's Trust Responsibility for Tribal health and public health, we are confident that you hear us when we ask that Congress finally funds support IHS. At the very least – support advance appropriations for IHS in the FY23 budget.

We will continue to advocate for full IHS appropriations at $49.83 billion and make the IHS funding mandatory until it is achieved.

Following the devastating impact in 2013 of the 16-day government shutdown, NIHB moved quickly to pass Resolution 14-03 in Support of Advance Appropriations for IHS. Tribal leaders

from across the country have repeatedly shared the real-life impacts of government shutdowns. Several Tribes reported losing key medical personnel due to frequent government shutdowns. As you must know, the physician and other health care provider workforce vacancies at IHS are approximately 70%. Recruiting and retaining medical professionals to work for Tribes on reservation communities and remote Native Alaskan villages is already difficult. The impact of government shutdowns on our ability to provide care to our People is life and death! In other examples, Alaska Natives, who rely on heating oil shipped by a river for Tribal health clinics, experience a profound loss of buying power if a government shutdown stops IHS funds and prevents heating oil from being bought in bulk at a lower rate. Further, if a shutdown persists, rivers freeze, further thwart needed oil transportation.

Tribes ceded over 500 million acres of Indian Territory in exchange for healthcare. Treaties are not discretionary; health funding to Indian Country should be mandatory. American Indians and Alaska Natives are not asking for public welfare or a handout – what we request is prepaid. This simple request to streamline our funding through Advance Appropriations should be simple and quick.

Advance Appropriations for IHS is a bi-partisan and bi-cameral policy initiative that increases Tribal and federal government efficiency, reduces federal taxpayer waste, and saves Native lives by providing stable funding for health care services in Indian Country. Since Advance Appropriations are merely advance agreements to provide funding at a later date, they are a budget-neutral and flexible solution to the outsized impacts of funding disruptions on Indian Country. Congress can rescind or modify Advance Appropriations before they are obligated, allowing Congress to respond to changing circumstances based on real-world challenges. The result is continuity of services that reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies and uncertainty for IHS and Tribal Nations.

The President's FY 2023 Budget Request to Congress calls for a historic shift in the paradigm of Nation-to-Nation relations that seeks to restore the promises made between our ancestors and the United States in several essential programs, including mandatory funding for IHS. However, Advance Appropriations and mandatory funding are not mutually exclusive requests. Once IHS obligations are provided through mandatory-direct appropriations, there is no need for Advance Appropriations through the annual regular appropriations process. Until Congress provides Mandatory Appropriations, Advance Appropriations are a fiscally responsible solution to the outsized impacts of disruptions and uncertainty in funding for the Indian health care system.

Advance Appropriations for IHS is a step towards fully honoring the treaty and trust obligation for health. A commitment that Congress will enact solutions that address the health inequities and ensure the health and wellness of Tribal communities. The insecurities surrounding discretionary funding for Indian Health threaten the stability of health care delivery in Indian Country. As we work together to restore promises, all options must be on the table for Congressional action.

Thank you for your attention to this information and for any support you can provide for advance appropriations for IHS and full funding and mandatory funding for IHS. The National Indian Health Board stands ready to work with you to achieve these objectives. Should you have additional questions or require more information, please contact NIHB Director of Government Relations, Aaron Payment, at (202) 578-0907.

Yours in Health,

William Smith, Valdez Native Tribe
Chairman and Alaska Area Representative
National Indian Health Board

CC: The Honorable Chairman Sanders, Senate Committee on the Budget
The Honorable Ranking Member Graham, Senate Committee on the Budget
The Honorable Chair DeLauro, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Ranking Member Granger, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Chairman Leahy, Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Vice Chairman Shelby, Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Chairman Yarmuth, House Committee on the Budget
The Honorable Ranking Member Smith, House Committee on the Budget
Stacy Bohlen, NIHB Chief Executive Officer
NIHB Board of Directors