



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Senate Committee on Appropriations U.S. Senate April 15, 2016

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Written Testimony for Fiscal Year 2017

On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for the record regarding the appropriations for transportation and housing programs.

NCAI is the oldest and largest national tribal organization in the United States that is dedicated to protecting the rights of tribal governments to achieve self-determination and self-sufficiency. The federal appropriations for Indian programs within the U.S. Department of Transportation and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development are vital components to the federal trust responsibility. Tribal infrastructure programs are critical to ensuring that tribal governments can provide for the economic and social well-being of their tribal members and members of the surrounding communities. NCAI looks forward to working with members of this Subcommittee as you consider Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 funding.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development:

Housing remains a priority for Indian tribes. Housing overcrowding and shortages are challenges that persist in tribal communities. Statistics illustrate the increasing need for housing in Indian Country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2006-2010 American Community Survey there are an approximate 142,000 housing units in Indian Country, and those homes frequently lack utilities and basic infrastructure. The survey shows that approximately 8.6% lack complete plumbing facilities, 7.5% lack kitchen facilities, and 18.9% lack telephone service. Close to 30% of Indian homes rely on wood for their source of heat. These staggering statistics represent longstanding challenges facing Indian tribes, and without sufficient funding investments and proper government-to-government consultation to address these challenges.

The Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act (NAHASDA) authorized Indian tribal governments to develop, construct and maintain housing for members. The NAHASDA consolidates existing housing funds into a single block grant—the Indian Housing Block Grant—and enables tribes to exercise self-determination by designing and implementing tribal housing and other community development infrastructure programs that best meet the needs of their members. The NAHASDA has resulted in increased tribal capacity to address related infrastructure and economic development challenges.

However, funding for the Indian Housing Block Grant-NAHASDA has remained stagnant at approximately \$650 million since FY 2012, while the need for housing continues to increase in Indian Country.

Training and Technical Assistance

Training and technical assistance are important for tribes and tribal designated housing entities, and provide critical capacity building opportunities for tribal housing personnel. The U.S. Department Housing and Urban Development (HUD), provides funding specifically for training and technical assistance programs for NAHASDA within the Office of Native American Programs (ONAP) to carry out training and capacity building. In HUD's FY 2017 budget request, HUD has requested the transferring of the budget authority and funding for NAHASDA training and technical assistance from the ONAP to HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) with \$3.5 million allocation of this program. NCAI's membership has expressed concern that no tribal consultation was performed prior to transfer to these programs, which will have a direct impact on tribal housing authorities. NCAI request that Congress ensure that any funds allocated to this program are used to carry out the functions as intended and that consultation occur prior to any additional changes to the program.

Department of Housing and Urban Development- FY 2017

- *Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG)*: NCAI recommends that the IHBG be funded at not less than \$700 million. IHBG funding is important for housing development, construction, infrastructure, maintenance, and repair in Native communities. These funds also assist tribal governments and TDHEs to leverage other funds, such as low-income housing tax credits.
- *Indian Housing Loan Guarantee Fund (Section 184)*: NCAI supports the increase of HUD's Budget Request for FY 2017 of \$10 million. The Section 184 program is important for tribal members to become homeowners on tribal lands.
- *Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG)*: NCAI recommends that ICDBG be funded at not less than \$80 million. This funding provides much needed resources to improve the overall economic and community development groundwork for tribal communities.
- *Training and Technical Assistance*: NCAI recommends that this program be funded at not less than \$4 million. Building tribal capacity is essential for tribes to enhance their housing and community development projects.
- *Tribal HUD-VASH Demonstration Program*: Through Tenant Based Rental Assistance, HUD has provided funding for rental voucher assistances to address homelessness among Native American Veterans. NCAI supports the Tribal HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) Demonstration Program to be funding in the amount of \$7 million for FY 2017.
- *Native Hawaiian Housing Block Grant*: NCAI recommends that this program be funded at \$12 million. Since 2000, NHHBG funding has been the primary source for housing assistance for eligible Native Hawaiians who reside on Hawaiian Home Lands. The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, the sole recipient of NHHBG funds, uses these funds to increase the supply of affordable housing units or rehabilitate existing units to relieve

some of the overcrowding pressures and substandard living environments experienced in many low-income Native Hawaiian households.

- *Native Hawaiian Loan Guarantee Fund (Section 184A)*: NCAI recommends level funding for the Section 184A Loan Guarantee at \$500,000.

U.S. Department of Transportation:

The latest transportation authorization Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act, or “FAST Act”, was signed into law by President Obama on December 4, 2015. The FAST Act authorized transportation programs for Indian tribal governments by authorizing the Tribal Transportation Program (TTP): Public Transportation on Indian Reservations (Tribal Transit Program) administered by the Federal Transit Administration; establishes a tribal self-governance with the U.S. Department of Transportation; and addresses safety for tribal transportation.

Surface transportation in Indian Country involves thousands of miles of roads, bridges, and highways. According to the latest National Tribal Transportation Facility Inventory (NTTFI), there are approximately 160,000 miles of roads and trails in Indian Country owned and maintained by tribes, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), states and counties. Of those, Indian tribes own and maintain 13,650 miles of roads and trails, of which only 1,000 (or 7.3 percent) are paved, with another 12,650 miles consisting of gravel, earth, or primitive materials. Of the 29,400 miles owned and maintained by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 75 percent of them are graveled, earth, or primitive. When combined, the roads owned and maintained by Indian tribes and the BIA are among the most underdeveloped and unsafe road networks in the nation, even though they are the primary means of access to American Indian and Alaska Native communities by Native and non-Native residents and visitors alike.

Department of Transportation FY 2017 Request:

- *Tribal Transportation Program (TTP)*: NCAI supports an increase of \$475 million for TTP to improve repair and construct existing infrastructure.
- *Public Transportation on Indian Reservations (5311(c))*: NCAI supports an increase of \$35 million for the Tribal Transit Program.
- *Highway Traffic Safety Grant (Section 402) Indian Highway Safety Program (Administered by Bureau of Indian Affairs)*: NCAI supports the funding of \$5 million for the Indian Highway Safety Program.
- *Tribal Transportation Self-Governance Program within U.S. Department of Transportation*: NCAI request that Congress fulfills the budget authorization for implementation of this program.

Bureau of Indian Affairs Road Maintenance:

Although the majority of tribal transportation programs are authorized and funded through the Department of Transportation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Road Maintenance program within the Department of Interior is critical to BIA owned roads and facilities. The BIA is

responsible for maintaining approximately 29,400 miles of roads in Indian Country including 900 bridges. However funding for the BIA Road Maintenance has remained stagnant at approximately \$24 million for several appropriations cycles, while deferred maintenance has risen to over \$289 million for FY 2015. The condition of these roads is increasingly concerning for tribal members and members of surrounding communities. The lack of sufficient infrastructure also hampers economic development opportunities for tribes. NCAI would like the Subcommittee to be made aware of this program because the overall condition and integrity of the transportation infrastructure systems in Indian Country includes not only TTP and Tribal Transit Programs but it also includes BIA owned roads and facilities which has a direct impact to tribal and surrounding non-tribal communities who commute daily.

In conclusion, NCAI is dedicated to improving and enhancing federal appropriation for housing and transportation infrastructure in Indian Country. Infrastructure development is fundamental to the enriching tribal governments and providing the essential governmental services for their communities and surrounding communities.