February 28, 2020

Representative Betty McCollum
2256 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative McCollum,

The National Council of Urban Indian Health writes to respectfully request that Congress honor the United States’ trust responsibility to urban Indians by passing emergency funding that includes Urban Indian Organizations for the prevention and treatment of the Coronavirus - Covid 19 risk. We request at the very least $94 million for emergency funding and health education/promotion for UIOs. Please include the term Urban Indian Organization to ensure the funding goes to those programs because often times if Urban Indian Organizations are not explicitly mentioned, they are forgotten about.

According to the World Health Organization, the coronavirus has reached more than 30 countries and is expected to cause major strain upon the United States medical health care delivery system. More than 70% of American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) reside in urban or suburban areas (i.e. urban Indians). Data has shown that AI/AN people already have a disproportionate burden of infectious disease morbidity compared with the general U.S. population – including influenza.

The Indian Health Services (IHS) funding is authorized under the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA) [25 U.S.C. § 160 et seq.] and Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) are the only part of the Indian health System (IHS/Tribal facilities/UIOs) that only receive funding from primarily one source within the IHS budget - the urban Indian line item. There are 41(UIOs) in 22 states and they are an integral part of the Indian health system.

UIOs provide culturally-competent healthcare to AI/AN patients, however they are forced to operate on such low funding margins that interruptions in daily operations (including those leading to funding shortfalls) have dire effects, even leading to death of AI/AN patients. In order to effectively prevent the spread of the Coronavirus -Covid 19, test and treat AI/AN patients, UIOs must be included in the emergency or supplemental budget.

We urge the Committee support urban Indian health care and include Urban Indian Organizations to ensure the best possible health outcomes of urban AI/AN people during this critical time.

Sincerely,

Francys Crevier
Executive Director