

August 1, 2025

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Shelly Moore Capito
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Education, Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
170 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
and Related Agencies
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Protecting the WIOA Section 166 Program for Indian Country in the FY 2026 Appropriations Process

Dear Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Capito, and Ranking Member Baldwin,

We hope this finds you well.

We, the **XX** undersigned [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#) (WIOA) (2014) [Section 166 Indian and Native American program grantees](#) and key Native organization stakeholders, are writing to formally convey our shared position regarding **the need for Congress to preserve and adequately fund the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Section 166 Indian and Native American Programs in the FY 2026 appropriations process.**

Section 166 of WIOA is dedicated to supporting employment and training activities for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian individuals to “develop more fully the academic, occupational, and literacy skills of such individuals; make [them] more competitive in the workforce and to equip them with the entrepreneurial skills necessary for successful self-employment; and promote the economic and social development of Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities *in accordance with the goals and values of such communities.*”

The more than 160 Tribal Nation governments and Native organizations that receive WIOA Section 166 funding have a long and proven track record of generating positive education and employment outcomes for the Native people they serve. For example, in 2024, grantees reported a 69.5% employment rate among all Native adults a year after their exit from the WIOA program. Nearly half of these grantees integrate WIOA Section dollars as core funding in Public Law 102-477 programs. “477” enables Tribal Nations and intertribal consortia to merge program funds from across 12 federal agencies into a single, tribally designed, and comprehensive workforce development approach, which has produced equally remarkable outcomes. For example, 477 Program participants report a total average gain of \$9.45 per hour in unsubsidized employment, and 94% of them complete the training and employment goals identified in their 477-based Individual Self-sufficiency Plans.

Despite the significant benefits the WIOA Section 166 Indian and Native American Programs generate for Native workers across the country, the Administration’s FY 2026 Budget Request baselessly proposes to eliminate them altogether “and replace them with the Make America Skilled Again (MASA) grant program. MASA will consolidate multiple standalone programs into a single program that can serve a range of job seekers, including Indians and Native Americans” (see pages 29-33 [here](#)). Congress created the Section 166 Indian and Native American Programs as a stand-alone initiative and set-aside fund under WIOA precisely because Native applicants were not getting their fair share of federal funding when having to compete against non-Native applicants. The Administration’s proposed move represents a direct violation of the trust and treaty responsibilities that all federal agencies – including DOL – are obligated to fulfill.

In addition, by proposing to abolish the WIOA Section 166 Programs, the Administration would render DOL's statutory [Native American Employment and Training Council](#) essentially unnecessary, stifling Indian Country's primary voice in informing federal workforce development policy and funding.

Congress should *not* eliminate WIOA Section 166 funding – instead it should *increase* that funding to meet the needs of Native people and grow the program's success: The Section 166 Program has been chronically underfunded since the 1970s, utterly failing to keep pace with the rapidly increasing Native population in need of these services as well as the rising costs of education, training, and related services. Since its funding peak of \$225 million in 1979, Section 166 has experienced a precipitous funding decline to about \$70 million annually. **Congress should: (1) increase dedicated funding for WIOA Section 166 grantees commensurate with Native population growth, the identified service needs of the eligible population, and inflation; and (2) convert this funding to forward funding to avoid ongoing issues with DOL moving money to grantees in a timely fashion.**

We appreciate your consideration of our consensus position on the need to protect this critical program supporting Indian Country workforce development, and we welcome a conversation with you to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

[Signatories TBD]