



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

June 4, 2015

The Honorable John Barrasso
Chairman
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
838 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
838 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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NCAI HEADQUARTERS
1516 P Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20005
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www.ncai.org

RE: THE NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS SUPPORTS S. 1419 – THE NATIVE LANGUAGE IMMERSION STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT ACT – AND URGES SWIFT ACTION

Dear Chairman Barrasso & Vice Chair Tester:

On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest and largest organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments, I urge your committee to support the Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act (S. 1419). NCAI strongly supports S. 1419 and respectfully requests swift action by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs to help further its passage in the 114th Congress.

The survival of American Indian and Alaska Native languages is essential to the success of tribal communities and Native ways of life – they are the repository of the collective wisdom and culture of tribal nations, containing both ceremony, indigenous knowledge and mechanisms for social governance that have been thousands of years in the making, and can lead to positive reinforcement of traditional values essential not just to tribal nations but to the United States.

Moreover, Native languages are currently in a state of emergency. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 74 Native languages stand to disappear within the next decade. Equally alarming, scholars project that without immediate and sustained intervention; only 20 Native languages will be spoken by 2050.¹ Language immersion programs and schools provide the best opportunity to restore fluent Native language speakers in tribal communities. Furthermore, language immersion schools and programs are a proven tool to improving the educational outcomes for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children.

During NCAI's Annual Convention in 2013, our membership passed Resolution [#TUL-13-034](#) – *Support for a Formula Grant Program for Language Immersion Schools for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians* (see attached Resolution #TUL-13-034) calling for development and funding of Native language immersion programs in pre-schools, elementary schools, and secondary schools in Indian Country. We believe that S. 1419 reflects the requests of our membership for

¹ Moseley, Christopher (ed.). 2010. Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, 3rd edn. Paris, UNESCO Publishing.
Online version: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/atlas>

tribal immersion schools, and fully support a hearing on it by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs as soon as possible.

NCAI's membership fully supports this bill and look forward to passage of this important piece of legislation by your committee and Congress. In the previous session of Congress this legislation passed your committee unanimously, we hope to see such action occur again with this committee. If you have any questions, please contact Cesareo Alvarez, NCAI Legislative Fellow, at calvarez@ncai.org or 202-466-7767.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jacqueline Johnson Pata".

Jacqueline Pata
Executive Director
National Congress of American Indians



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

The National Congress of American Indians Resolution #TUL-13-034

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TITLE: Support for a Formula Grant Program for Language Immersion Schools for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians

WHEREAS, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

WHEREAS, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

WHEREAS, education of all citizens of tribal nations in a culturally appropriate and relevant manner is the cornerstone of future economic development and self-sufficiency of tribal nations, and is also a fundamental trust responsibility of the United States government, as reiterated in NCAI Resolution #ABQ-10-054; and

WHEREAS, language immersion schools are a proven tool to improve learning outcomes for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children; and

WHEREAS, NCAI has created a task force focusing on Native languages and their preservation, and the task force supports amending Title VII to specifically include authorization for language immersion schools; and

WHEREAS, Title VII as contained in legislation pending in the 113th Congress does not contain any specific grant program for language immersion schools.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that NCAI urges Congress to include in Title VII of the ESEA reauthorization bill provisions that will expand tribal language immersion schools; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NCAI urges that the language immersion school provisions be communicated as soon as possible to the appropriate Congressional leaders and to the Congressional representatives for the states in which large numbers of American Indians and Alaska Natives reside; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NCAI encourages tribal leaders to visit with the Congressional representatives to explain why these provisions are critical to the future of tribal education; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of NCAI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the General Assembly at the 2013 Annual Session of the National Congress of American Indians, held at the Cox Business Center from October 13 - 18, 2013 in Tulsa, Oklahoma with a quorum present.


President

ATTEST:


Recording Secretary