

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 14, 2025

President Donald Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC

Dear President Trump:

We write to express our concern regarding recent reporting that layoffs at the Indian Health Service (IHS) resulting from Executive Order 14210 and OPM guidance will dramatically impact American Indians and Alaska Native (Native) communities' access to health care.<sup>1</sup> Tribal Nations have a legal and political relationship with the United States, and the federal government has a fundamental obligation to fulfill its treaty and trust responsibilities to Tribal Nations – an obligation that includes providing services such as health care to Native communities. Abruptly terminating any IHS employees undermines this responsibility, and we urge you to halt the mass firing of any essential health care workers at IHS to preserve the Federal obligations to Tribes.

Reporting indicates that more than 850 IHS employees, including 90 physicians, 350 nurses, at least 25 nurse practitioners, nearly 20 dentists, 43 dental assistants, more than 85 pharmacists, 45 lab technicians and more than 15 service area chief executives or their deputies are at risk of being laid off immediately.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly concerning because IHS has long struggled with chronic health care workforce shortages. Last year, IHS experienced nearly 2,000 vacancies, and a 2018 GAO report found that IHS had an overall health care provider vacancy rate of 25 percent across service areas. These shortages, which are attributed to limited recruitment incentives, lower salaries, lengthy hiring processes, and geographic isolation, result in longer wait times for appointments, over worked providers who cannot spend enough time with patients, inadequate follow-up care, and provider burnout – leading to lower patient satisfaction and worse health outcomes. It is not uncommon for recently hired clinicians to be the only primary care provider or specialist in their IHS Service Area. AI/ANs already face significantly lower life expectancies compared to the general U.S. population and higher rates of disease including diabetes and hypertension.

Not only will this lead to worse health outcomes, but overall costs will also rise. With less health care services at existing IHS facilities, there will be increased Purchased Referred Care referrals. This will increase costs for the Federal government and require increased travel,

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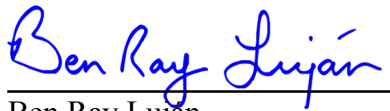
<sup>1</sup> EXECUTIVE ORDER: 14210 <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/14/2025-02762/implementing-the-presidents-department-of-government-efficiency-workforce-optimization-initiative>

<sup>2</sup> Abrupt federal layoffs expected to hit tribal programs. <https://ictnews.org/news/abrupt-federal-layoffs-expected-to-hit-tribal-programs>

accommodations, and expenses, creating increased hardships and barriers for patients and families seeking care far from where they live on Tribal lands.

The federal government is already failing to meet its trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations, and further reductions in IHS' workforce will severely impact the health and wellbeing of Tribal communities across the country. Therefore, we strongly urge you to stop these firings and retain IHS probationary staff.

Sincerely,



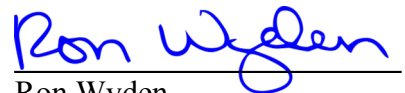
Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



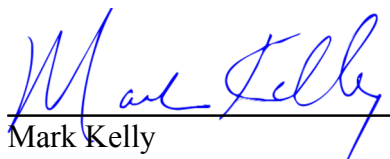
Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



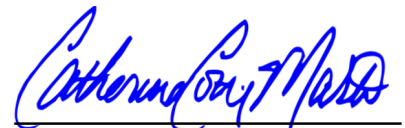
Ruben Gallego  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator