



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

**MAR 25 2020**

Dear Tribal Leader:

These are unprecedented times for our Nation and Indian Country. I am writing today to let you know that I, and the entire Indian Affairs team, stand with you. Indian Affairs is prepared to provide you with technical assistance as your government and communities engage in mitigation and response efforts. We continue to work closely with our federal partners to ensure maximum inter-agency coordination and cooperation in service to Indian Country and Alaska Native communities.

To date, we have:

- Created a webpage for the latest updates on Indian Affairs efforts to support Tribes through this crisis: [bia.gov/covid-19](https://bia.gov/covid-19);
- Hosted regional calls twice per week for each Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Regional Director to discuss with Tribal leaders such topics as response and mitigation efforts, and ongoing and evolving challenges facing our communities;
- Activated an Indian Affairs Emergency Management Team for COVID-19 under the leadership of BIA Deputy Bureau Director for Office of Justice Services, Mr. Charles Addington, as incident commander. This team is engaged with the emergency management structure within the Department of the Interior, it actively tracks issues, disseminates critical information throughout Indian Affairs, and works with regional leadership to coordinate responses to Tribal governments;
- Actively participating as a member of the White House Indian Country COVID-19 Response Team, together with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Indian Health Service (IHS), and Administration for Native Americans, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Centers for Disease Control, National Congress of American Indians, Veteran Affairs and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA);
- Closed 100 percent (183) of Bureau of Indian Education and Tribally operated schools, and those closures mirror local or State guidance. Student lunches are being provided consistent with local guidelines and in coordination with USDA nutrition programs; and
- The Indian Affairs national workforce is maximizing telework flexibilities. Although employees are practicing social distancing, our programs and services are up, operational and still available to federally recognized Tribes.

What we do together to face this significant and dynamic challenge is more powerful than anything we can do alone. I personally understand the severity of this situation for our communities. I encourage you to review the following websites for accurate and updated information:

- [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2109-ncov/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2109-ncov/index.html)
- [www.ihs.gov/cornavirus](http://www.ihs.gov/cornavirus)
- [www.bia.gov/covid-19](http://www.bia.gov/covid-19)

We recognize and respect the State of Emergencies declared throughout Indian Country. If you have not declared a State of Emergency, there is more information specifically on declaring a State of Emergency for Tribal governments that can be accessed here:

<https://www.fema.gov/frequently-asked-questions-current-process-tribal-governments-request-presidential-declaration>.

It is important to me that we ensure there is a consistent, reserved space and time to learn from each other. In these unprecedented times of social distancing, we are in a position to meet virtually to keep our communities most safe.

I encourage you to participate in the national ***ALL TRIBAL AND URBAN INDIAN ORGANIZATION LEADERS CALL*** hosted by IHS ***every Thursday from 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM.*** Indian Affairs will be participating on this call as necessary.

Conference Call: 1-800-857-5577

Participant Password: ihs123

Webinar Adobe Connect: <https://ihs.cosocloud.com/r4k6jib09mj/>

Finally, Indian Affairs is committed to continued meaningful Tribal consultation and want to ensure robust and meaningful conversations in the coming weeks. We can learn from each other and continue to problem-solve using our collective wisdom to face the ongoing COVID-19 challenge. While we have postponed many previously planned consultations in the field until further notice – we are exploring our options to conduct these consultations digitally or telephonically. We will provide notice of those changes to ensure that you can participate safely from your community.

We will continue working diligently and creatively alongside you each day for benefit of Indian Country and Alaska Native communities. If you would like to provide written insights into the needs of your community then please contact us at [consultations@bia.gov](mailto:consultations@bia.gov).

Sincerely,



Tara Sweeney

Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs