

United States Senate

September 23, 2020

COMMITTEES:
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRWOMAN, WATER AND POWER
SUBCOMMITTEE
ARMED SERVICES
BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN
AFFAIRS
INDIAN AFFAIRS
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

The Honorable Ben Carson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Carson:

I write today to urge you to waive the undisbursed funds factor requirement of the Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG) funding disbursed under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Waiving this requirement will ensure that HUD IHBG policy satisfies the intent of the CARES Act, and that tribes will continue to receive necessary assistance to address unique housing challenges on tribal lands.

HUD's own research has demonstrated the need to improve housing conditions and availability for tribes. The 2017 HUD assessment of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Housing Needs found that physical conditions of housing and overcrowding are substantially worse for Native Americans living on tribal reservations than for other Americans, and estimated that tens of thousands of new housing units are necessary to replace distressed housing and reduce overcrowding. IHBG funding is vital for the construction, operation, and maintenance of housing on tribal reservations that will improve the conditions outlined the 2017 assessment.

Poor housing conditions on tribal reservations have caused particular challenges in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Factors including overcrowding and a lack of access to running water have contributed to elevated COVID-19 infection rates on tribal reservations. Thus, continued support for higher-quality tribal housing will yield public health benefits as well as economic ones.

I am grateful that the CARES Act included \$200 million in supplemental IHBG funding to assist tribes with the additional housing requirements and costs associated with COVID-19. However, I am concerned that the undisbursed funds factor requirement under 24 CFR § 1000.342 will lead to a reduction in future IHBG funding for tribes. Congress intended CARES Act funds to supplement regular appropriations in order to address the unprecedented needs of the COVID-19 pandemic, not detrimentally impact regular funding programs. Accordingly, I urge you to use your existing authority to not count IHBG-CARES funds towards a tribe's undisbursed funds from prior years when applying the undisbursed funds factor under the IHBG formula. This action will improve access to safe, suitable, and sanitary affordable housing for tribes across Arizona and the nation.

Sincerely,



Martha McSally
United States Senator