

AI/AN Health Partners

October 30, 2019

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Health, Education Labor and
Pensions Committee
SD-430 Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions Committee
SR-154 Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

The American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Health Partners urge the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee to approve S. 2629, the United States Public Health Service Modernization Act of 2019 scheduled to be marked up by the Committee on Thursday, October 31st.

The AI/AN Health Partners is a coalition of health organizations dedicated to improving health care for American Indians and Alaska Natives who face substantial health disparities, and higher mortality and morbidity rates than the general population. Having a sufficient workforce of health care providers at all times is key for the IHS be able to address the needs of AI/ANs.

There are 1,696 members of the U.S Public Health Service Commission Corps serving in the IHS. However, because they are part of the Corps, they can be pulled out and re-assigned to respond to national emergencies, like hurricanes, at any time.

In 2017, when Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria struck the country, 2250 USPHS officers were deployed for a total of more than 28,000 days. For each officer who deployed, the agency to which they were assigned--like the Indian Health Service--lost the services of that officer for however long they were away from their duty station. A Reserve Corps for the USPHS would provide a backfill of trained and qualified clinicians so that patient healthcare needs would not go unmet or be compromised.

We urge you to support S. 2629 because it will allow the IHS to backfill health care positions vacated when Regular Corps service members are deployed for public health emergencies. The IHS currently has over 1,300 vacancies for health care providers; so, to lose members of the Corps further taxes the IHS' ability to treat its own patients.

Thank you for considering our request,

American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Dental Association
American Dental Education Association
American Optometric Association
American Physical Therapy Association
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc. (COA)
National Kidney Foundation