

# **Reps. Gallego, Mullin Introduce Bill Boosting Resources for Urban Indian Health Organizations**

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Press Release

WASHINGTON, DC – Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) and Rep. Markwayne Mullin (R-OK) introduced H.R. 6535 last week to expand Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) coverage to urban Indian health organizations, giving them a desperately needed boost in resources as they suffer shortages, closures, and financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Indian Health System, commonly referred to as the ITU system, is made up of the Indian Health Service (IHS), Tribal health programs, and urban Indian organizations (UIOs). UIOs provide culturally competent care for the over 70 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives who live in urban centers. H.R. 6535 would create parity within the ITU system by extending FTCA coverage to urban Indian organizations, who currently are forced to divert resources away from health care in order to foot exorbitant liability costs themselves.

“Urban Indian organizations, including Native Heath in my District, are on the front lines of this pandemic. Individual facilities are reporting skyrocketing costs in the hundreds of thousands and dangerous supply shortages. Three UIOs have already closed their doors as a result of the strain,” **said Rep. Gallego, Chair of the Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples.** “We cannot afford to leave urban Indians without access to care during this public health crisis. My bill will both bring long overdue parity to urban Indian health providers and provide an infusion of desperate resources to an urban Indian health system on the brink.”

“Urban Indian Health Centers play a critical role in providing health care to Native Americans. Our bill ensures they are covered by the FTCA so that they won’t have to use their limited resources to cover costly liability bills. I want to thank Congressman Gallego for working with me on this legislation that will improve health care for Native Americans,” **said Rep. Mullin.**

**The National Council for Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) said:** We are extremely grateful for Congressman Gallego and Congressman Mullin’s leadership in introducing this legislation for a long-needed fix to the medical malpractice liability protection to ensure parity for Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs). A single UIO can pay as much as \$250,000 annually, which could be spent providing health care for the American Indians and Alaska Natives. As all other Indian Health Care Providers are covered by FTCA and it is extended to Community Health Centers as well as volunteers, this legislative fix is needed now more than ever to ensure continuity of health care in a time when it’s needed most.

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