

PRESS RELEASE: First-Ever Standalone NCUIH Bill Passes Congress to Shore Up Resources for Urban Indians

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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December 20, 2020 (Washington, DC) - On December 20, the Senate voted to pass to H.R. 6535 by unanimous consent to pass H.R. 6535 to extend Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) coverage to urban Indian organizations (UIOs) instead of having to divert scarce resources away from health care to foot exorbitant insurance costs. On December 17, the United States House of Representatives passed by unanimous consent under suspension of the rules. The passage of this non-controversial bill is a step forward in creating parity within the Indian Health System to ensure that the trust and treaty responsibility is upheld by the US government.

“We applaud Congress and the Administration for their steadfast efforts to help urban Indian health workers get coverage like their other IHS and Tribal counterparts as we are in the midst of a pandemic. As our frontline workers risk their lives in this pandemic that is devastating Indian Country, this will be critical to saving Native lives and will increase available health care services. We are thankful to Senators Smith, Lankford, Udall, Hoeven and Schumer along with our House leaders, Representatives Gallego, Mullin, Grijalva, Pallone, Young, and Cole” said Francys Crevier (Algonquin), NCUIH CEO.

In August, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that across 23 states, cumulative incidence rates of lab-confirmed COVID-19 among AI/ANs are 3.5 times higher than for non-Hispanic Whites. Also, according to CDC, COVID-19 hospitalization among AI/ANs were 4.7 times higher than for non-Hispanic Whites. As this pandemic devastates Indian Country, UIOs have been forced to make extremely difficult choices - facing competing priorities and expenses, like increased PPE and renovation costs, in addition to very costly malpractice insurance. As of November, “the Oklahoma City IHS Area now has the highest total number of cases” and the Oklahoma City Indian Clinic is one of the UIOs that pays the highest annual rate for medical malpractice insurance. If provided insurance parity with IHS and Tribal facilities, this UIO alone could direct up to an additional \$250,000 to patient care at a time when increased access to care is needed most.

This legislation has broad bipartisan support in both chambers and is endorsed by IHS. NCAI also has a standing resolution supporting this legislation, Resolution #PDX-20-038, “Supporting Extension of Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) Coverage to Urban Indian Organizations.”

Next Steps

H.R. 6535 will now go to the President for his signature.