

# Senators Highlight the Needs of Urban Indians in IHS FY 2023 Appropriations Hearing

Category: Policy Blog

written by Meredith Raimondi | May 31, 2022

On May 11, 2022, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies held a hearing to review the [Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2023 President's Budget for the Indian Health Service \(IHS\)](#). Several topics were discussed such as the President's request to shift IHS appropriations from discretionary to mandatory, as well as addressing the needs of urban Indian communities and urban Indian organizations (UIOs). Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) followed up with IHS Acting Director, Elizabeth Fowler, on the establishment of an Urban Indian Interagency Workgroup and highlighted the many underserved American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) residing in urban areas.

[Watch the full hearing.](#)

## Senator Van Hollen Calls Attention to Needs of Urban Indians

<https://ncuih.org/wp-content/uploads/Senator-Van-Hollen-Calls-Attention-to-Needs-of-Urban-Indians.mp4>

In Senator Van Hollen's remarks to Elizabeth Fowler, he turned to the topic of AI/ANs in urban areas, noting that "In the state of Maryland, we have 40,000 individuals who identify themselves as American Indian or part American Indian, and nearly half of that population resides in Baltimore. Nationally, 7 out of 10 American Indian or Alaska Native people reside in urban areas. **In my view, this is a population that has not received the attention or services that are deserved.**"

## Van Hollen Calls on IHS to Focus on Urban Indian Communities and Support the Establishment of an Urban Indian Interagency Work Group

The Senator followed up his remarks by calling attention to the lack of response from the Biden Administration on his request to create an Urban Indian Interagency Workgroup and took the opportunity to ask the Acting IHS Director for her support in focusing on urban Indians. Fowler stated that "the Indian Health Service considers urban Indian organizations to be a vital component of the Indian health system" and expressed support for the creation of any urban interagency efforts.

On February 3, 2022, Senator Van Hollen, along with Senators Alex Padilla (D-CA), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Tina Smith (D-MN), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Ed Markey (D-MA), Mark Kelly (D-AZ), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Patty Murray (D-WA), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), and Jon Tester (D-MT) sent a letter to the Biden Administration requesting the establishment of an Urban Indian Interagency Work Group to identify the needs and develop strategies to better serve urban American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations. The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) worked closely with Senator Padilla on this letter and supports the effort to bring better representation for the needs of American

Indians and Alaska Natives who do not reside on Tribal land.

- [NCUIH Policy Alert: Padilla, 13 Other Senators Call on Biden Administration to Establish Advisory Group for Urban Indians](#)
- [Senate Letter on Establishing Urban Indian Interagency Workgroup](#)

## **Senator Merkley Emphasizes Importance of UIOs**

In his remarks to Elizabeth Fowler, Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) followed Senator Van Hollen's comments about urban Indians and emphasized the importance of UIOs in the state of Oregon. The Senator asked Fowler if more grants went out to UIOs as a result of the 17% increase in funding. Fowler informed that while IHS did not fund any additional UIOs with that funding, the funding will allow some referral-only programs to initiate clinical services to provide their patients. Senator Merkley noted that the committee will submit questions for the record to "better understand how we are spending the additional money in that account and understanding how urban Indian population is being better served, what specific changes have occurred."