Murkowski, Tillis, Murray, and Cortez Masto Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Strengthen Urban Indian Organization Workforce

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U.S. Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Patty Murray (D-WA), Thom Tillis (R-NC), and Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) have introduced bipartisan legislation to allow U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps officers (PHSCOs) to be detailed directly to Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs).

Recently, Secretary Kennedy assigned 70 officers to Indian Health Service facilities to help stabilize staffing needs. Allowing PHCSOs to be detailed directly to UIOs is a longstanding priority that would improve capacity to serve patients and families.

"UIOs provide far more than a place for an annual check-up; they deliver culturally grounded care that reflects the needs and values of the communities they serve," **said Senator Murkowski**. "All Native people deserve access to quality health care, whether they live in a city or a rural community. Ensuring these facilities are adequately staffed will strengthen health outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native communities nationwide and help fill a critical gap in care."

"Nevada's Urban Indian health facilities are chronically understaffed," **said Senator Cortez Masto**. "Even the best doctors and nurses can't provide patients with the quality of care that they need if there simply aren't enough of them. This commonsense fix gives the Department of Health and Human Services the flexibility it needs to ensure that Tribal communities across the Silver State can get the health care they need."

"We are grateful to Senators Murkowski, Murray, Tillis, and Cortez Masto for championing this bipartisan effort to allow U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Officers to be detailed directly at urban Indian organizations. Due to limited funding, Urban Indian Organizations continue to face significant challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled health care professionals, and detailing Commissioned Officers help them address workforce shortages and increase collaboration across the federal health care system. We urge Congress to pass this legislation swiftly so that Urban Indian Organizations can benefit from this vital workforce support." — **Francys Crevier (Algonquin), CEO of NCUIH**

Background

The *Public Health Services for Advancing Care and Creating Efficient Support Systems in Underserved Communities Act*, or the PHS ACCESS Act, would amend Section 214 of the Public Health Service Act to formally authorize the Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary to detail PHCSOs to UIOs to perform work related to the functions of HHS. Detailing officers to UIOs would help address persistent workforce shortages at UIOs, bring skilled, federally-supported clinicians and public health professionals into urban Indian health settings, and strengthen coordination across the broader Indian health system.

Next Steps

The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. The bill will need to be passed out of the Committee before receiving full consideration from the Senate.