

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 14, 2020

Steven Mnuchin, Secretary
United States Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

David Bernhardt, Secretary
Tara Sweeney, Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Mnuchin, Secretary Bernhardt, and Assistant Secretary Sweeney:

As a state with 9 federally recognized Tribes, we write to urge the U.S. Department of the Treasury to reject any population based formula regarding the allocation of \$8 billion of economic stimulus funding for tribal communities, established in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. In your guidance, Treasury should also provide tribal governments with maximum flexibility on how to use those funds once they are dispersed.

The \$8 billion included in the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CVF) for tribal governments was meant for “necessary expenditures incurred due to the Coronavirus Disease....” The expenditures should include those that a tribal government reasonably deems necessary to address COVID-19 impacts, maintain government services, and preserve tribal business entities during the pendency of the COVID-19 pandemic. A purely population based allocation of CVF funds limits many tribes’ abilities to address the unique needs of each tribal community and harms the ability of Oregon tribal governments to care for their communities, employ their neighbors, and adequately respond to COVID-19.

Oregon Tribes directly and indirectly support more than 12,000 Tribal and non-Tribal jobs and over \$600 million in annual wages, benefits, and self-employment earnings throughout the state. Any allocation that fails to take into account Oregon Tribes’ economic footprint will not serve the central purpose of the CARES Act. Oregon Tribes would be uniquely impacted by a population-only approach, especially one that allocates the CVF based on whether Oregon tribal members reside on reservation. As you know, many Oregon Tribes were formally terminated by the United States in 1954, before restoration in the 1980s and 1990s. An allocation based on the number of enrolled Tribal members residing on their own reservation would re-penalize many Oregon Tribes, some of whom are still rebuilding their reservations. It would also fail to recognize the infrastructure impediments on rural reservations and the fact that all Oregon Tribes serve their members no matter where they live. A single allocation formula based solely on population underestimates the challenges that Oregon Tribes face in providing services on both rural reservations and in urban centers and would harm tribal communities.

Swift action from the Treasury that distributes COVID-19 relief funding fairly to Tribes, while providing Tribes with the flexibility they need to address this unprecedented pandemic would provide much needed assistance and stability to Indian Country. We thank you for your attention in this critical manner.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator