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CONGRESS PROVIDES AID TO TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN COVID-19 RELIEF

Washington, D.C. – The nation’s 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), which collectively are the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), appreciate the urgently needed funding for TCUs contained in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), which the Senate passed early this morning. While important to address immediate, short-term needs, the funding falls far short of the estimated **\$140 million** TCUs – and their students – need to adequately and *equitably* address the critical postsecondary, workforce development, research, and community-support challenges facing Indian Country as the COVID-19 virus sweeps across this country, in all four directions.

Through the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), the CARES Act provides \$20 million in immediate, emergency relief to TCUs and an additional share of the \$153 million allocated to the BIE as part of a massive \$30 billion national “Education Stabilization Fund.” For state-based education programs, this funding is split nearly 50-50 between K-12 schools and higher education, and AIHEC expects a similar division by the BIE.

In addition, the CARES Act allocates certain funding under the U.S. Department of Education’s HEA Title III program, of approximately:

- \$50 million for Tribal Colleges and Universities
- \$25 million for Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions
- \$6 million for Native American-Serving, Nontribal Institutions.

The bill also provides small pockets of additional funding for which TCUs would be eligible to receive funding or apply to receive funding through the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Education.

TCUs and TCU students, like all other postsecondary institutions and students in the nation, are faced with tremendous, disruptive change – the need to modify, halt, or extend programming, transition to online learning, and create safe spaces and opportunities to learn at a distance. The road ahead is difficult: TCUs are among the most under-resourced institutions in the country, and TCU students are among the financially poorest. In fact, 78 percent of TCU students receive Pell grants, more than half are first-generation students, and about 85 percent are rural residents from federally recognized Indian tribes. Many lack reliable Internet access at home.

TCUs face another challenge, which distinguishes them from other institutions of higher education: collectively, TCUs have the slowest Internet access, at the highest average cost, of any group of institutions of higher education in the country. The average connectivity speed at TCUs is 336 Mbps, compared to 513 Mbps at other two-year institutions and 3.5 Gbps at other four-year institutions. The average connectivity costs at TCUs range from \$40,000 to \$250,000 per year. Iłisaġvik College, a TCU, has both the most expensive and slowest Internet connectivity in the *entire* U.S. higher education system (EDUCAUSE/AIHEC survey, 2018-19).

The 37 TCUs are committed to meeting the urgent and dire logistical and support needs of students and families, but they cannot do it without adequate support at all levels. In the coming weeks and months, AIHEC will continue to work with Congress toward ensuring equity in funding for TCUs and accountability to Indian Country.

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The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) comprises the nation’s 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). TCUs are public institutions of higher education operating more than 75 sites in 16 states and serving approximately 165,000 American Indians, Alaska Natives, and other rural residents each year in academic and community-based programs.