



NICWA

National Indian Child Welfare Association

NICWA STATEMENT ON PRESIDENT'S FY 2018 BUDGET

On May 23, 2017, the White House released its fiscal year 2018 budget for federal agencies. This was the more detailed version of the budget blueprint, or “skinny budget,” that was released in April of this year. As we reviewed the president’s budget, it was hard to understand how the list of budget cuts being proposed for tribal human service programs under the Bureau of Indian Affairs was honoring the federal trust relationship between tribal nations and the United States. Tribal nations relinquished millions of acres of land, and many of their rights to the resources contained within those lands, in exchange for the guarantee of protection of their continued existence and of the right of self-government within their own negotiated territories. This includes providing for Native people’s health and well-being. This solemn contract with tribal nations does not contain caveats for changes in the political winds or new administrations coming into office. It is the bedrock of the relationship between the United States and the sovereign tribal nations within our lands, recognized in our United States Constitution and countless federal laws and federal court decisions.

The president’s FY 2018 Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs [budget](#) recommends significant cuts and even elimination of one program (Housing) for all six tribal human service programs. These programs are the core safety net that provides much-needed basic services to vulnerable tribal families, including protective services for children and elders, burial assistance for family members that have passed, housing for low-income families, and job training and income assistance for unemployed adults. In most cases, these programs only provide services and support after all other federal and state resources have been exhausted, so they truly serve the neediest of the needy in tribal communities. The combined reduction in tribal human services programs under the president’s budget is almost 16%, and the Human Services budget category is recommended for the largest reduction of any budget category within the overall Bureau of Indian Affairs budget. This budget will not only hurt tribal nations, but also state governments, as they will be increasingly burdened with decreasing tribal support and resources to help them serve the large number of Native children and families living off of tribal lands.

Within the president’s Department of Health and Human Services [budget](#), while a number of child welfare programs that tribal nations operate are recommended for funding at FY 2017 levels, the administration has asked for significant cuts to other critical programs that serve vulnerable Native families living both on and off tribal lands. These include the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Medicaid. The president’s budget also proposes eliminating the Community Services Block Grant and Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, both of which provide basic supports for low-income families.

While Congress will make the final decision regarding funding levels for these programs, the president’s FY 2018 budget sets a tone that is unmistakably punitive for the most vulnerable in our tribal communities—our children, low-income and unemployed adults, and elders. We urge all advocates for Native children and families and federal lawmakers to stand with us as we seek a more just and equitable budget and pursue the promises of the trust relationship that were intended for our Native children and families. Please [contact](#) your Senate and House of Representatives members and tell them how these cuts will affect the Native children and families that we serve.