

Support Passage of the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Program Reauthorization Act

Cosponsors: Reps. Soto*, McCollum*, Young*, Haaland*, Cole*, Moore*, Norton*, Tipton*, DeFazio*, O'Halleran*, Grijalva*, Napolitano*, Davids*, Kildee*, Cardenas*, Torres Small*, Kind, Larsen, Case, Gabbard, Pocan, Cook, Kilmer, Adam Smith, McGovern, Khanna, Crist, Wild, Vargas.

Endorsed by: National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), National Indian Education Association (NIEA), National Education Association (NEA), The National Council for Languages and International Studies (NCLIS), Teach for America (TFA), National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE), California Language Teachers' Association (CLTA).

Dear Colleague,

I strongly urge you to act to safeguard Indigenous languages by cosponsoring the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Reauthorization Act (H.R. 912). The Senate companion championed by Sen. Tom Udall was favorably reported out of Committee and passed by a voice vote without amendment.

Named after a New Mexican Tewa teacher and storyteller known for her dedication to revitalizing her people's language, Esther Martinez Native American language grants provides opportunities for tribal communities to assess, plan, develop, and implement projects that ensure the survival and continued vitality of Native languages. This legislation aims to extend and update this grant program so more Native communities are eligible to strengthen their linguistic heritage and sustain support for survival school and language nest programs past the life of a single grant cycle.

Why is this legislation needed?

Native languages have shaped U.S. history. In World War I and World War II, Native American soldiers known as "Code Talkers" used tribal languages to transmit coded tactical messages. Code Talkers were able to improve the speed of communications encryption during both wars, leading directly to American out-manoeuvring of enemy troops on numerous occasions.

The loss of Native languages endangers the federal trust responsibility to Tribes. In exchange for lands acquired through treaties, land settlements, and other means, the U.S. government maintains a unique legal and political relationship with Tribes and their citizens based on a promise to provide certain services and respect Tribes as domestically-dependent sovereigns. Part of this relationship is contingent on the protection of Tribes' health, education, lands, economic autonomy, and other public services, including cultural property and languages. Experts estimate that all of the approximately 148 Native languages that are still spoken are at risk of extinction within the next 50 to 100 years. The loss of these languages would deal a significant blow to our shared American and global heritage, but tribal communities are fighting to reverse this devastating trend.

Native languages encourage community resilience. Native language programs reaffirm that Indigenous languages are valuable and valid tools for community resilience and epistemological diversity. This reaffirmation increases the self-esteem and self-efficacy of Native language-learners – two important factors that research says improve student academic outcomes and executive . In addition, language

programs bring together tribal members and cultural mentors, in line with two generation (2Gen) approaches to community-building. When youth have at least one role-model, research has shown that they are more likely become leaders in their communities.

Esther Martinez language programs have had a significant impact on Indian Country and Alaska Native, Oklahoma, and urban Indigenous communities. Biennial evaluations by the Department of Health and Human Service, where the programs are housed, show that grantees increase the abilities of more than 4,000 youth and adults to speak a Native language on a yearly basis. These same grantees train 170-280 Native language teachers each year.

Bill Summary

H.R. 912 – the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Reauthorization Act:

- Reauthorizes through FY2024 both Esther Martinez grant programs administered by the Administration for Native Americans at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) – the Native American Languages Preservation and Maintenance (P&M) grant program and the Esther Martinez Initiative (EMI) grant program.
- Decreases the required minimum number of enrollees in Native American language nests funded by the grant program from 10 to 5 enrollees, and in the Native American language survival schools from 15 to 10 enrollees.
- Increases the maximum possible duration of all Esther Martinez grants from three years to five.
- Increases annual authorized appropriations from \$5 million to \$13 million.

To become a cosponsor of the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Reauthorization Act, or for further information, please contact Alanna Purdy (Alanna.Purdy@mail.house.gov or 5-0955).

Sincerely,

Rep. Ben Ray Luján

Member of Congress