

November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Governor Tim Walz  
Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan  
Commissioner Alice Roberts-Davis (Department of Administration)  
Commissioner Thom Peterson (Department of Agriculture)  
Commissioner Steve Kelley (Department of Commerce)  
Commissioner Paul Schnell (Department of Corrections)  
Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker (Department of Education)  
Commissioner Steve Grove (Department of Employment and Economic Development)  
Commissioner Jan Malcolm (Department of Health)  
Commissioner Dennis Olson (Office of Higher Education)  
Commissioner Jennifer Leimaile Ho (Housing Finance Agency)  
Commissioner Rebecca Lucer (Department of Human Rights)  
Commissioner Lodi Harpstead (Department of Human Services)  
Commissioner Nancy Leppink (Department of Labor and Industry)  
Commissioner Myron Frans (Minnesota Management and Budget)  
Commissioner Tarek Tomes (Minnesota Information Technology Services)  
Commissioner Sarah Stommen (Department of Natural Resources)  
Commissioner John Harrington (Department of Public Safety)  
Commissioner Margaret Anderson Kelliher (Department of Transportation)  
Commissioner Larry Herke (Department of Veterans Affairs)



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To the Leaders of the State of Minnesota:

The purpose of this message is to call your immediate attention to the ongoing needs of the urban American Indian community in Minnesota, as well as to the powerful capabilities that the signatories of this letter currently possesses. It appears to us that our people are once again being overlooked, forgotten, or marginalized as the result of the grant making decisions and resource distribution choices being effectuated by the state of Minnesota's government – of which you are all leaders.

We, the undersigned of this letter, are deeply troubled at the continued lack of sustained resources deployed directly to our community by you, the leadership of this state. As we are all well aware, there remain deep economic, educational, and social-emotional disparities impacting our people that have inhibited our ability to thrive for multiple generations. The undersigned of this letter comprise a slate of historically active nonprofit organizations that not only reflect the very community we serve, but who have also been providing the highest quality services to our people for nearly fifty years. However, in light of a slew of recent funding decisions emanating from the state of Minnesota and its various state departments, we are gravely concerned that these state departments – under your direct supervision - are regressing towards old patterns of arbitrary resource distribution that have historically neglected our people in favor of other populations, other initiatives, or worse, the

empowerment of outside non-indigenous organizations to enter into our urban community in order to provide services.

To this end, funding related to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center grant award, Healthy Transitions Homelessness Prevention grant (now called the Healthy Transitions to Adulthood), Supportive Services for Employment grants, and funding around the Indian Child Welfare Act were all denied distribution to urban Indigenous organizations within this coalition that had previously been awarded these very same funds (in some case for over a period of ten years) and who all had delivered remarkable achievements and outcomes through these previous awards on behalf of our community. For these organizations to now suddenly find themselves being rejected in favor of non-native enterprises is stunning, unfathomable, and unprecedented. Unfortunately, these examples are just a few of the many funding disbursements from multiple state agencies that have also followed this new pattern of awards to non-culturally specific and non-indigenous organizations.

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With regard to this last point, it must be stated that despite the best intentions, these outside agencies simply do not possess the history, efficacy, or necessary relationship with our people to provide the services in any adequate manner to alleviate these long standing disparities. In short, we are concerned by an emerging trend from the state of Minnesota that seems to be favoring non-indigenous organizations and non-indigenous urban priorities despite the readily identifiable needs of our community, and the proven track record of quality demonstrated by urban indigenous non-profits.

As is often stated and remains true, our community has no appetite – at all – for outside, non-American Indian enterprises to intrude into our community with the intent of providing services to help us. We do not need, nor do we seek, outsiders to “save” us – whether they are government, not-for-profit groups, or private sector companies. The urban American Indian community currently possesses a multitude of qualified and effective service providers that are American Indian staffed, American Indian led, and American Indian governed – all of whom are more than capable of providing the needed services – complete with a proven record of achievement dating back several decades. Successful services must be provided to our own, for our own, by our own.

It must also be stated again that our community has no desire to be forced to participate within services or plans that are devoid of our culture, our traditional teachings, and our customs. We insist on the utilization of *culturally contextualized* programming for our people – which comprises the most effective, best practice models by which our organizations adhere – wherein our culture is omnipresent. By definition, these culturally contextualized services cannot be provided by non-American Indian entities, which further emphasizes the previous point mentioned above.

As such, a growing frustration within our community is once again surfacing. We are frustrated by what appears to be a massive step backwards by the state of Minnesota to provide consistent, long-term, and robust investment of resources directly into our community from the state government – especially in light of several years of immense budget surpluses, and especially given the consistent acknowledgement by you that the government seeks to address these long standing disparities in order to effectively create “one Minnesota” that emphasized an authentic development of equity within traditionally marginalized communities. In so doing, it would allow for Minnesotans – including the urban American Indian population – to succeed and thrive. We took you at your word that this would manifest through your efforts during your tenure as our leaders. Thus far the Governor and Lieutenant Governor have ambitiously attempted to govern on behalf of these very principles during their first year in office. However, with regard to the state agencies to which they are responsible for leading and administering, it unfortunately appears that we are now very much off track and in fact regressing.

Therefore this letter is being submitted on behalf of the urban indigenous leadership and the various agencies and corporations whom they represent that work directly within the urban American Indian community in Minnesota. Owing to the long historical pattern of overt exclusion of the American Indian people within state affairs and resource distribution, coupled with recent troubling developments, we are now compelled to advocate in this manner on behalf of our own. We believe that we must once again openly call the attention of the Minnesota government leadership within our state to the urban American Indian community, because for all intents and purposes, it appears that the urban American Indian population is at risk of sliding back into invisibility.

In order to rectify this situation and to return the state of Minnesota back to the legitimate trajectory of progress established by the preceding Dayton administration, we the undersigned would like to

put forth the following strategies that will serve to rectify this current problem not only for the urban American Indian community but for all communities of color that also remain mired in historical disparities:

**Strategy I: Review and Reform of Scoring Metrics for Grant Proposals by ALL State Agencies**

We formally and respectfully request direct and ongoing engagement with Commissioners, department staff, and our community leaders to review and reform scoring rubrics used in the evaluation process for submitted grant proposals. Notably, weighted or “priority points” must be given to those communities most negatively impacted by persistent disparities, as well as weighted or “priority points” assigned to culturally specific organizations embedded within their targeted communities who are already providing the required services.

**Strategy II: Review and Reform of Evaluation Process**

We formally and respectfully request direct and ongoing engagement with Commissioners, department staff, and our community leaders to review and reform the evaluation process in terms of who the reviewers are, where they are drawn from, and the level of requisite transparency needed to effectively recruit reviewers from impacted communities and from those working in the field, as well as to review and report on the actual evaluation process.

**Strategy III: A Public Commitment by State Leadership for Authentic Equity Development for All Marginalized Communities**

We formally and respectfully request the direct public codification or public declaration by all state leaders and state staff – beyond just the Governor and Lieutenant Governor - to commit to *authentic* equity development as a directive to be followed by all state agencies with regards to resource distribution and policy initiatives – which by definition requires a disproportionate amount of resources to be invested into the impacted communities in order to adequately remediate the historical disparities still inhibiting these communities from thriving. In particular, this necessitates immediate and ongoing distributions for the urban American Indian people who are the state’s very first citizens. In this regard, equity DOES NOT mean equality, and must be reflected in the practices of all state agencies, their leadership, and their staff, in order for the efforts of this state to be authentic in its assertion that it is truly committed to equity development.

This commitment to authentic equity development must be overt, recognizable, and consistent in all efforts made by all leaders and staff working within the various state agencies of Minnesota – and as such must be reflected in their words, actions, public appearances, and interviews – but most especially must be reflected within their internal policies and resource distribution practices. Energy and actions must necessarily follow rhetoric in order for equity to be truly achieved for all Minnesotans. Our community, through years of learned practice, have become quite astute towards detecting empty promises, and therefore have little patience to endure such practices any further. As such we demand more from our state agencies.

Going forward, we the undersigned are formally requesting a sit down meeting with the Governor of Minnesota, the Lieutenant Governor, and key Commissioners from the various Minnesota state agencies in the very near future to further discuss the implementation of these strategies.

We would like to offer the dates of either Monday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019 or Monday, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019 as possible times to meet first with the Governor and Lieutenant Governor. From this meeting we would like to then transition to meet with the entire cabinet sometime in December of 2019.

We look forward not only to your response to this letter, but to the request to meet as well.

Our stated goals and philosophies around “One Minnesota” are the same. It is apparent that our motivations are inspired by the very same desires. So let us now come together and work towards making the actions of the state of Minnesota – via its various state agencies - match our shared vision for One Minnesota, and honor our commitments to our communities. We owe it to our people to pursue this course.

On their behalf, we respectfully submit this letter to you.

Pilamaya yelo, Pidamaya, and Chii Migwetch.

Respectfully,

**Michael Goze**  
President and CEO  
American Indian Community Development Corporation (AICDC)



**Deb Foster**  
Executive Director  
Ain Dah Yung Center (ADYC)



**Kristin Kinney**  
Executive Director  
American Indian Family Center



**Joe Hobot, Ed.D**  
President and CEO  
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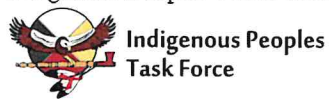
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