

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20515

August 18, 2022

The Honorable Secretary Xavier Becerra  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, D.C., 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

We write to express our concern regarding the ending of the Healthy Native Babies Project (HNBP), which was formerly housed at the National Institutes of Health. The HNBP, which is an adaptation of the Safe to Sleep campaign, has provided critical culturally appropriate risk-reduction information about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and other sleep-related causes of infant death to American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities since 2003. Allowing this crucial program to expire is unacceptable, and we urge you to transfer the HNBP to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Reproductive Health – Maternal and Infant Health Division to ensure the continued success of the program.

Since 2003, the HNBP has successfully reached many Native communities that are disproportionately affected by public health disparities that impact prenatal, pregnancy, and postpartum care. The HNBP has consistently provided culturally attuned programming through toolkits, provider training, and community stipends to promote quality safe sleep practices. As of 2022, the HNBP successfully disseminated more than 180,000 culturally attuned materials related to safe sleep practices, trained more than 580 health care professionals, conducted more than 60 outreach events, and awarded more than 120 stipends to Tribes and Native-led organizations – and accomplished all of this with limited funding.

As maternal and infant health disparities worsen among AI/AN communities, it is vital that the Department of Health and Human Services continues to invest in initiatives that support AI/AN maternal and infant health. In 2018, Sudden Unexplained Infant Death (SUID) rates for AI/AN people were the highest among any demographic.<sup>1</sup> This stark disparity is more than twice the rate for non-Hispanic white infants.<sup>2</sup> These trends illuminate the need for greater federal investments and targeted approaches specifically for improving maternal and infant health for AI/AN populations.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (2018), Sudden Unexpected Infant Death and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, Data and Statistics, <https://www.cdc.gov/sids/data.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

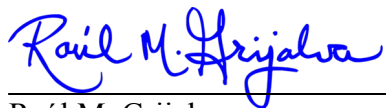
Unfortunately, on May 5, 2022, the HNBP contract ended. Vice President Harris has taken steps to ensure a whole-of-government approach is taken to address the maternal and infant health crisis within AI/AN populations,<sup>3</sup> and transferring the HNBP to the CDC Reproductive Health – Maternal and Infant Health Division would aid the Administration in achieving this goal.

The CDC is appropriately positioned to prioritize resources developed by AI/AN communities to address the maternal and infant health crisis that has existed among AI/AN communities for centuries. Further, transferring the HNBP will have minimal fiscal impact on the CDC. Historically, the HNBP has received \$217,000 through three-year agreements. The proposed transfer of the HNBP to the CDC would ensure these federal resources continue to reach Tribal and Native communities across the nation.

Without the HNBP, it is far too likely that maternal and infant mortality rates will worsen among AI/AN communities. Therefore, we urge you to permanently renew the Healthy Native Babies Project and move it to the CDC’s Reproductive Health – Maternal and Infant Health Division.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,



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Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Member of Congress




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Karen Bass  
Member of Congress


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<sup>3</sup> The White House, (April 13, 2022), Fact Sheet: Biden – Harris Administration Announces Additional Actions in Response to Vice President Harris’s Call to Action on Maternal Health, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/13/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-additional-actions-in-response-to-vice-president-harris-call-to-action-on-maternal-health/>



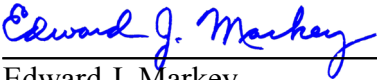
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Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



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Adam Smith  
Member of Congress



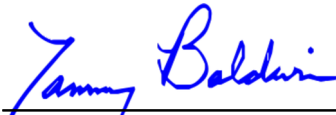
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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



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Gwen S. Moore  
Member of Congress



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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

Cc: Director Rochelle Walensky, Center for Disease Control  
Director Lawrence A. Tabak, National Institutes of Health  
Daron Carreiro, Senior Policy Advisor for Native Affairs, White House Domestic Policy  
Council