



# USET

SOVEREIGNTY PROTECTION FUND

**Nashville TN Office**  
711 Stewarts Ferry Pike, Ste. 100  
Nashville TN 37214  
P: (615) 872-7900  
F: (615) 872-7417

**Washington DC Office**  
400 North Capitol St., Ste. 585  
Washington DC 20001  
P: (202) 624-3550  
F: (202) 393-5218

*Transmitted via email*

June 12, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, &  
Forestry  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, &  
Forestry  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow,

On behalf of the United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF), we request that the Senate Committee on Agriculture adopt an amendment to be offered by Committee Member, Senators Tina Smith (D-MN) and Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) during the June 13, 2018 mark-up hearing of the Committee's 2018 Farm Bill. The Smith-Heitkamp amendment would apply the long-standing self-governance authority of P.L. 93-638, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA), to provide for Tribal administration of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP).

USET SPF is an intertribal organization comprised of twenty-seven federally recognized Tribal Nations, ranging from Maine to Florida to Texas<sup>1</sup>. USET SPF is dedicated to enhancing the development of federally recognized Tribal Nations, to improving the capabilities of Tribal governments, and assisting USET SPF Member Tribal Nations in dealing effectively with public policy issues and in serving the broad needs of Indian people.

While there are some provisions within the Farm Bill that will benefit Indian Country, notably absent are provisions that would restore Tribal food sovereignty and provide improved food assistance to Tribal households. Tribal Nations must have the authority to engage in Tribal self-governance for vital nutrition programs in order to meet the unique needs of Tribal citizens. The Smith-Heitkamp amendment seeks to address these issues and is a top priority of USET SPF and other Tribal Nations for the 2018 Farm Bill.

### **Tribal Administration of SNAP**

Tribal Nations, like other units of government, are responsible for providing essential services to their citizens, including those related to nutrition. However, and in spite of a 2014 USDA feasibility study, Tribal Nations continue to be excluded from administering SNAP and other nutrition programs under P.L. 93-638 contracting and compacting. USET SPF Tribal Nations have demonstrated we have the capacity to fully administer SNAP programs to Tribal citizens, as we have been administering far more complex federal

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<sup>1</sup> USET SPF member Tribal Nations include: Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas (TX), Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians (ME), Catawba Indian Nation (SC), Cayuga Nation (NY), Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana (LA), Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana (LA), Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (NC), Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians (ME), Jena Band of Choctaw Indians (LA), Mashantucket Pequot Indian Tribe (CT), Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe (MA), Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida (FL), Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MS), Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut (CT), Narragansett Indian Tribe (RI), Oneida Indian Nation (NY), Pamunkey Indian Tribe (VA), Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township (ME), Passamaquoddy Tribe at Pleasant Point (ME), Penobscot Indian Nation (ME), Poarch Band of Creek Indians (AL), Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (NY), Seminole Tribe of Florida (FL), Seneca Nation of Indians (NY), Shinnecock Indian Nation (NY), Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana (LA), and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) (MA).

programs under ISDEAA authority for years, including twenty-two Tribally-operated healthcare facilities. Tribal control over SNAP would result in the improved food assistance for Tribal citizens, as Tribal self-determination has proven to be an efficient, effective approach that recognizes our inherent sovereignty and produces results for American Indian and Alaska Native people. USET SPF strongly urges the Committee to remove the existing barriers to Tribal self-governance under the 2018 Farm Bill so that Tribal Nations are able to assume full management of their own nutrition programs under SNAP.

### **Conclusion**

While USET SPF is pleased that many Senators have expressed strong general support for Indian Country's priorities, language that would apply full P.L. 93-638 authority to SNAP has not been included within the 2018 Farm Bill. USET SPF urges the Committee to adopt the Smith-Heitkamp amendment to expand P.L. 93-638 to SNAP, and consider measures that would expand this authority to all USDA food assistance programs not currently included within the 2018 Farm Bill. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact Ms. Liz Malerba, USET SPF Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs, at [LMalerba@usetinc.org](mailto:LMalerba@usetinc.org) or 202-624-3550.

Sincerely,



Kirk Francis  
President



Kitcki A. Carroll  
Executive Director