



USET

SOVEREIGNTY PROTECTION FUND

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Transmitted Electronically

September 5, 2025

Senator Jerry Moran
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Tracey Mann
344 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Support for S. 2140 and H.R. 4085, the Haskell Indian Nations University Improvement Act

Dear Senator Moran and Representative Mann,

On behalf of the United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF), we write to express our strong support for passage of S. 2140 and H.R. 4085, the "Haskell Indian Nations University Improvement Act." Haskell Indian Nations University (Haskell) is a federally operated university within the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), funded through congressional appropriations. Along with the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, it is one of only two federal institutions serving Native students exclusively.

USET SPF is a non-profit, inter-tribal organization advocating on behalf of thirty-three (33) federally recognized Tribal Nations from the Northeastern Woodlands to the Everglades and across the Gulf of Mexico.¹ USET SPF is dedicated to promoting, protecting, and advancing the inherent sovereign rights and authorities of Tribal Nations and in assisting its membership in dealing effectively with public policy issues.

Haskell educates roughly 900 students from over 140 federally recognized Tribal Nations, making it a national institution rooted in the United States' solemn, legal, and moral responsibilities to uphold treaty and trust obligations to Tribal Nations. Tuition is federally supported, and students pay limited fees that vary whether the student lives on campus. Founded in 1884 as Haskell Institute, a federal Indian boarding school, it has since been reshaped into the university it is today. Haskell graduates return home as teachers, health professionals, social workers, business leaders, and Tribal leaders, strengthening the exercise of the inherent sovereignty and self-determination of Tribal Nations across Indian Country.

¹ USET SPF member Tribal Nations include: Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas (TX), Catawba Indian Nation (SC), Cayuga Nation (NY), Chickahominy Indian Tribe (VA), Chickahominy Indian Tribe—Eastern Division (VA), 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), Mi'kmaq Nation (ME), Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MS), Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut (CT), Monacan Indian Nation (VA), Nansemond Indian Nation (VA), 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), Rappahannock Tribe (VA), 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), Upper Mattaponi Tribe (VA) and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) (MA).

Because there is Strength in Unity

Haskell Under Federal Management

Under direct federal management, the university has experienced sustained governance and compliance failures that harm student achievement and undermine institutional confidence. Leadership has been unstable, with high rates of overturn resulting in nine university presidents in seven years. Long-deferred maintenance issues have left facilities in disrepair and deteriorated, with some buildings left vacant or deemed hazardous due to dangerous conditions. Student safety systems have broken down, with documented failures to prevent and respond to sexual assault and misconduct. Allegations of theft, nepotism, and retaliation among staff have persisted. Further, required background checks were not consistently completed, allowing individuals with serious felony convictions to serve on the Board of Regents.

In February of this year, federal workforce reductions eliminated about 30 percent of Haskell's staff, only for many positions to be reinstated weeks later in the middle of the academic year. These are not isolated errors; they reflect structural limits of operating a modern university through a federal agency. Haskell's accreditation status was recently downgraded from "Continued Accreditation with Monitoring" to "Accreditation on Notice" due to findings that the University is out of compliance in one area and is at risk of falling out of compliance in five other areas.

Granting a Federal Charter to Haskell Supports Self-Governance

Enactment of S. 2140 and H.R. 4085 will provide a proven remedy by granting a federal charter with independent governance, modeled on successful congressional charters such as the Institute of American Indian Arts. These bills preserve federal obligations and appropriations consistent with trust and treaty obligations, while establishing an independent, Tribally representative Board of Trustees to hire leadership, set policy, and shoulder fiduciary responsibility for outcomes of the University. These bills maintain transparency and accountability through continued congressional oversight, annual reporting, budget review, and Inspector General audits. Further, these bills diversify funding by authorizing private fundraising and endowment matching, effectively providing a means to unlock non-federal dollars to address decades of deferred maintenance and sustain operations. In short, the charter model keeps the federal commitment in place while empowering the people with the greatest stake in Haskell's success to govern effectively.

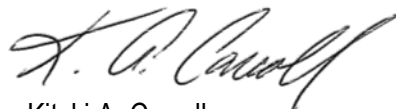
Conclusion

USET SPF conveys its strong support for passage of the Haskell Indian Nations University Improvement Act. As sponsors of S. 2140 and H.R. 4085, we respectfully request that you champion the solutions to improve management and operability of Haskell, including working with your colleagues to garner support for enactment of these bills. These efforts will uphold the federal government's solemn legal and moral obligations to fulfill trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations that support higher education opportunities for our people and demonstrate a commitment to effective governance principles. 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 or 615-838-5906.

Sincerely,



Chief Kirk Francis
President



Kitcki A. Carroll
Executive Director

CC: The Honorable Roger Marshall
The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
The Honorable Derek Schmidt