



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

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**Testimony of the United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund
Outside Witness Testimony for the Record
to the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2018**

The United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF) is pleased to provide the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies (CJS) with the following priorities as the Subcommittee considers appropriations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and urge the Subcommittee to uphold its trust responsibilities and obligations to Tribal Nations in making appropriations.

USET SPF is a non-profit, inter-Tribal organization representing 26 federally recognized Indian Tribal Nations from Texas across to Florida and up to Maine. USET SPF is dedicated to enhancing the development of Tribal Nations, to improving the capabilities of Tribal governments, and assisting the USET SPF Member Tribal Nations and their governments in dealing effectively with public policy issues and in serving the broad needs of Indian people.

As recognized in statute and upheld through the courts, the United States government has a trust responsibility to provide for the health and welfare of federally-recognized Tribal Nations. As such, inadequate funding for Indian programs at any federal agency or department represents unfilled treaty and trust obligations. With this in mind, we would like to highlight the following items of interest within the Subcommittee's jurisdiction. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list, and we join other Tribal Nations and organizations in advocating for increases to all funding for federal Indian programs that appear in the CJS bill. In addition, USET SPF is troubled by a number of proposals within the President's FY 2018 Budget Blueprint. We urge the Subcommittee to avoid making such dramatic cuts to non-defense discretionary spending and instead prioritize Tribal public safety and nation rebuilding.

Department of Commerce

Continued Importance of the Economic Development Administration and Minority Business Development Agency

USET SPF is particularly concerned by the proposed elimination of both the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA). While these agencies may duplicate efforts to provide economic supports to other populations nationally, it is vitally important to recognize the deep disparities Indian Country faces in economic development and independence. While some Tribal Nations across the country tell stories of remarkable success in a variety of industries, many Tribal Nations continue to struggle to rebuild their economies, facing numerous barriers including lack of funding, difficulty accessing capital, high levels of unemployment, and regulatory hurdles. The funding provided by EDA and MBDA helps to fill gaps in opportunity and access for Tribal Nations, and continues to be critically important to USET SPF and Indian Country in general. We urge this Subcommittee to avoid eliminating or underfunding these agencies.

Department of Justice

Tribal Set-Aside for Crime Victims

As you are likely well aware, Indian Country currently faces an epidemic of crime, with Tribal citizens 2.5 times more likely to become victims of violent crime and Native women, in particular, subject to higher rates of domestic violence and abuse. And yet, Tribal Nations do not have direct access to funding that would allow them provide victim services. Currently, Tribal Nations must access Crime Victims Fund (CVF) dollars via state pass-through or by competing for modest Department of Justice grants. As sovereign governments, Tribal Nations should have direct access to this funding--just like states and territories.

Should it not appear in FY 2017 continuing appropriations, 5% of annual disbursements from the CVF should be directed to Tribal governments. To meet the needs of crime victims on Tribal lands, Tribal governments need a stable source of funding to build the crime victim services and compensation infrastructure that is taken for granted in much of the rest of the country. Only then can Tribal citizens truly begin to access critically needed services and healing.

Funding for Tribal Access to Crime Databases

USET SPF also requests the allocation of \$6 million in the CJS bill to provide funding for implementation of the USDOJ Tribal Access Program to allow Tribal Nations to more effectively serve and protect their citizens and communities. The U.S. Department of Justice launched the TAP in August 2015 to provide Tribal Nations with access to information systems for both civil and criminal purposes. TAP allows Tribal criminal justice agencies to strengthen public safety, solve crimes, conduct background checks, and offer greater protection for law enforcement by ensuring the exchange of critical data across the Criminal Justice Information Services systems.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, with \$2 million of unexpended FY 2016 funds allocated by the USDOJ SMART Office and COPS Office, the Department was only able to deploy workstations and training to 11 Tribal governments, while more than 50 Tribal Nations, including several USET SPF member Tribal Nations, had submitted letters of interest to take part in TAP. Without a secure and robust funding stream, rollout to the remaining 300+ eligible Tribal Nations will be a long process, unnecessarily delaying Tribal access to this critical criminal justice data, hampering law enforcement coordination, and further compounding gaps in Tribal resources. Since the program began, only 19 Tribal Nations have benefited from this technology and training. Additional funding is needed to meet demand and a dedicated funding stream would ensure the long term viability of this program.

Conclusion

USET SPF appreciates the opportunity to provide our priorities for FY 2018 appropriations to the Subcommittee. We look forward to partnering to ensure the CJS FY 2018 appropriations bill reflects a commitment to the federal trust responsibility. Should you have questions or require additional information please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Liz Malerba, USET SPF Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs, at (202)-624-3550 or by e-mail at lmalerba@usetinc.org.