

The INTER-TRIBAL COUNCIL of the FIVE CIVILIZED TRIBES

May 18, 2020



Chuck Hoskin Jr.
Principal Chief

The Honorable Debra Haaland
1237 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
2207 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515



Bill Anoatubby
Governor

RE: Support for the 'COVID-19 DISASTER in Indian Country Act'

Dear Congresswoman Haaland and Congressman Cole,

The Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes, an organization comprised of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole Nations representing 790,000 tribal citizens throughout the United States, writes in support of the "COVID-19 DISASTER in Indian Country Act" that funds grants and makes unlicensed spectrum available for the immediate deployment of temporary broadband service on tribal lands.



Gary Batton
Chief

The Five Tribes have been on the front lines of this crisis from day one. We have continued to provide essential services to our citizens including health care, food, housing, public safety, education and other critical services. In many instances, we have even expanded these programs despite the connectivity disparity among our communities.



David Hill
Principal Chief

Most densely populated native communities are rural and remote, which tends to impact the availability of affordable, reliable broadband and wireless services. It's been reported that roughly 35 percent of households on tribal lands do not have quality access to broadband compared to 8 percent on non-tribal lands. This disparity is even more evident as tribes attempt to digitally deliver services to their citizens during this national crisis.



Greg P. Chilcoat
Chief

Tribal governments, like ours, were some of the first to make tough decisions like putting the most vulnerable employees on paid-administrative leave, allowing much of our workforce to telework, educating our children through distance learning and delivering healthcare to families and elders by way of telehealth and telenistry.

We've heard from tribal leaders throughout the country during this pandemic voice the barriers of quickly getting communities connected. The best way to combat this virus is through social distancing, which is likely to become the new normal as we reconstitute our procedures for health care and essential service delivery.

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Direct services will always have an aspect of social interaction and equipping tribal nations to do that digitally will continue to minimize risks to the vulnerable population and continue to slow the spread of COVID-19.

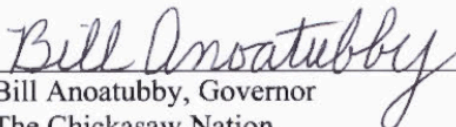
One of the unfortunate commonalities among tribal nations is that our citizens are disproportionately impacted by the health conditions that put them at a higher risks of a serious COVID-19 illness. As a result, our focus continues to be on protecting the health and safety of our citizens and communities.

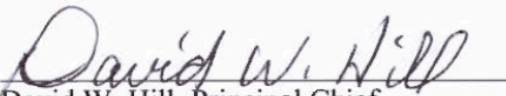
We will also join the National Congress of American Indians in asking the Federal Communications Commission to extend the deadline for the rural tribal priority window for 2.5GHz spectrum over tribal lands and delay the start of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (Auction 904).

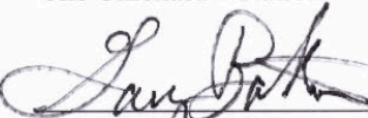
We believe this act, along with the extensions aforementioned, will better position tribes, Congress and the federal agencies in meeting their mutual goal of bridging the digital divide in Indian Country.

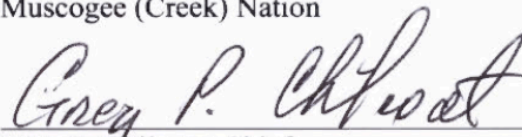
Thank you for your continued support. If we can provide further information to you or your staff, please contact Kim Teehee at: kim-teehee@cherokee.org or (202) 615-9505.

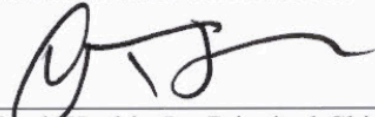
Sincerely,


Bill Anoatubby, Governor
The Chickasaw Nation


David W. Hill, Principal Chief
Muscogee (Creek) Nation


Gary Batton, Chief
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma


Greg P. Chilcoat, Chief
Seminole Nation of Oklahoma


Chuck Hoskin Jr., Principal Chief
Cherokee Nation

The INTER-TRIBAL COUNCIL of the FIVE CIVILIZED TRIBES

CC:

Senator Jim Inhofe

Senator James Lankford

Congressman Markwayne Mullin

Congressman Tom Cole

Congressman Frank Lucas

Congressman Kevin Hern

Congresswoman Kenra Horn