

September 8, 2004

Dear Representative,

We, the representatives of diverse religious faiths and beliefs, write in support of the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA), HR 2440. We believe that the reauthorization of this act will improve the health status of American Indians and Alaska Natives. We also believe that honoring federal trust obligations is a moral issue.

The health status of Native Americans is cause for concern. The Indian Health Care Improvement Act was initially passed in 1976 to assure a comprehensive and integrated approach to Indian health because the health status of native peoples ranked far below that of the general population. And today, almost 30 years later, it still does. The overall Indian health status is lower than the national average and the life span of native peoples is six years shorter than the general public.

Modernizing and improving the health care system for American Indians and Alaska Native communities is essential. IHCIA was last reauthorized in 1992. Without updates to IHCIA, it is difficult for tribes to keep pace with rapid changes in the delivery of health care. Reauthorization will allow tribes to address their health care needs and focus on new health services such as behavioral health. Programs and projects to address all facets of health care – acute, chronic, behavioral, and preventive —depend on reauthorization. This much-needed reauthorization has solid tribal and bi-partisan congressional support and permits program changes and expansions to the Indian health care delivery system.

Please support the passage of the reauthorization legislation. Tell the Administration that you support HR 2440 and that our nation's first inhabitants depend on this vital legislation. If you have questions about the legislation or about the concerns of our religious organizations, please telephone Patricia Powers at (202) 547-6000, ext. 116, or email pat@fcnl.org

Sincerely,

American Baptist Churches, USA
American Friends Service Committee
Call to Renewal
Church of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)
General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church
Mennonite Central Committee US Washington Office
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA

National Council of Jewish Women
Network: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries