

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
INDIAN AFFAIRS

August 19, 2024

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

The funding formula for tribal law enforcement programs is failing Great Plains reservation communities. Tribal law enforcement leaders acknowledge this problem and are in search of funding solutions. Therefore, we believe it is time for the Department of the Interior to critically examine the current methodology used to disburse appropriated law enforcement funding. As Great Plains tribes continue to deal with significant public safety threats, it will be necessary for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to make certain funding is reaching communities with the greatest need.

In the last several years, tribal leaders on the Great Plains have reported a significant increase in violent and drug-related crime. With some reservations experiencing violent crime rates five times higher than the national average, it has become apparent tribal law enforcement agencies are lacking necessary resources. Concurrently, these same agencies are also reliant on the BIA's outdated law enforcement funding methodology. Many tribal leaders believe the current method for disbursing law enforcement funding puts Great Plains tribes at a disadvantage.

It is my understanding the current formula used for disbursing law enforcement funding is based on historical allocations. The current distribution method has been in place since law enforcement was removed from the Tribal Priority Allocation (TPA) in 1999. Since this time, any budgetary increases provided to tribes have been required to be added on top of their 1999 budget. Consequently, a tribe's funding level from 25 years ago has an outsized influence on their current law enforcement budget.

The current distribution method has only allowed for Great Plains law enforcement agencies to receive slight funding increases. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, one Great Plains tribe received just over \$1.3 million in law enforcement funding. Today, this law enforcement agency is funded at the same level it was in FY 2013. Yet as you know, the overall topline budget for BIA Public Safety and Justice Law Enforcement Programs increased steadily during the same ten-year time frame. This has led some tribal leaders to conclude increases to BIA Public Safety and Justice Law Enforcement budgets are staying at the administrative level and not reaching officers on the ground.

As you are well aware, policing in tribal communities has changed markedly over the last two decades. Today, tribal law enforcement leaders are dealing with high levels of violent and drug-related crime. These issues have been exacerbated by a significant increase in transnational drug trafficking. At the same time, the cost of policing has increased steadily. As criminal investigations become more complex, law enforcement agencies increasingly rely on a wide range of technologies to stop crime.

If the Department of Interior is unable to modernize the BIA law enforcement funding formula, tribal leaders will have difficulty addressing public safety threats. It is my hope our federal partners will take this issue seriously and consult with tribes. Specifically, this could involve developing a distribution formula that is able to deliver appropriated funding to areas with the greatest need.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Michael Rounds". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator