



**Native
Professional
Advancement
Center**

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NPAC Board Chair Sends Urgent Letter to Congress Demanding Restoration of Native Workforce Funding

ALBUQUERQUE, NM — In a bold defense of Native communities, the [Native Professional Advancement Center \(NPAC\)](#) has called on Congress to reverse a dangerous budget proposal that would eliminate dedicated funding for the nation's only Indigenous-specific employment and training program.

[On July 18, NPAC Board Chair Lorraine P. Edmo sent a formal letter to Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Committee](#), requesting urgent action to restore at least \$60 million in FY2026 funding for Section 166 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The letter also urges Congress to protect two core pillars of Native self-determination within the Department of Labor: the Division of Indian and Native American Programs (DINAP) and the Native American Employment and Training Council (NAETC).

"This isn't just about funding. It's about keeping our seat at the table," said Darius Lee Smith, Executive Director of NPAC. "The proposal to eliminate direct federal funding for Native workforce programs undermines decades of progress and violates the government's responsibility to honor Tribal sovereignty."

A Critical Threat to Native Futures

The FY2026 federal budget proposal, put forward by the Trump administration, calls for the elimination of WIOA Section 166 and the consolidation of Native, youth, and dislocated worker training programs under a new state-controlled block grant titled "Make America Skilled Again." If enacted, the move would:

- Strip Tribes and Native nonprofits of direct access to critical workforce resources.
- Force Native communities to compete with states for funding not guaranteed to reach them.
- Several culturally specific support systems that have helped thousands of Native people gain education, employment, and self-sufficiency.

"These are not theoretical harms. These are programs that put food on tables and people into careers," Smith said. "At NPAC, we've spent over six decades building community-based, culturally grounded employment pathways. Removing these funds would devastate our ability to serve the people who rely on us most."

NPAC's Legislative Request

In the letter to Congress, NPAC outlined three urgent requests:

1. Restore at least \$60 million in funding for Section 166, consistent with FY2024 and FY2025 levels.
2. Maintain and staff the Division of Indian and Native American Programs (DINAP) as a separate unit within the Department of Labor, as required by WIOA statute.
3. Ensure ongoing, formal consultation with the Native American Employment and Training Council (NAETC)—a federally mandated advisory body meant to guide Native program performance and policy.

“DINAP was created long before DEI became a buzzword. It exists because Native communities know how to train and support our own,” **said Smith**. “The federal government has a legal and moral obligation to preserve it.”

A Call to Action

The House Appropriations Committee is scheduled to retake the possibility of a vote on this portion of the budget on September 2, 2025. NPAC is calling on Tribal leaders, Native organizations, community advocates, and the public to speak out now.

NPAC urges the public to:

- Call or email their Congressional representatives immediately to demand the protection of WIOA Section 166.
- Share their personal stories of how Native workforce programs have made an impact.
- Follow and amplify NPAC’s advocacy using #Defend166 and #NativeWorkforceNow.

“This fight is about more than funding—it’s about our future, our sovereignty, and our right to lead,” **said Smith**. “We won’t stand down, and we invite our allies to rise with us.”

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Founded in 1961, the [Native Professional Advancement Center](#), operating alongside the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), has been a pioneering force in advocating for the rights and well-being of Native American communities. Born out of a desire to see a world where Native peoples can freely exercise their rights to self-determination and sovereignty, we have spent over six decades dedicated to the empowerment and advancement of Native Americans across the United States.