



**Native
Professional
Advancement
Center**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, August 5, 2025

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NPAC Board Chair Sends Letters to Congressional Leaders Demanding Restoration of Native Workforce Funding

ALBUQUERQUE, NM — With just weeks remaining before Congress votes on a federal budget that could eliminate the nation's only Indigenous-specific workforce development program, the [Native Professional Advancement Center \(NPAC\)](#) is doubling down on its call to restore funding for [WIOA Section 166](#) and protect Indigenous job training and employment services across the country.

On July 18, 2025, NPAC Board Chair Lorraine P. Edmo sent formal letters to [Representative Tom Cole \(R-OK\)](#), Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, and [Representative Rosa DeLauro \(D-CT\)](#), the committee's Ranking Member, urging both leaders to oppose the administration's plan to eliminate funding for the Department of Labor's Native American Employment and Training Program in the FY2026 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill.

"This isn't about politics—this is about survival," **Edmo said**. "These grants keep Native people in jobs, in school, and on a path to self-sufficiency. Eliminating them would cause irreversible harm in our communities."

In addition to Cole and DeLauro, Edmo confirmed that she also sent letters to all members of the New Mexico congressional delegation, including Senator Martin Heinrich, Senator Ben Ray Luján, Representative Melanie Stansbury, Representative Teresa Leger Fernández, and Representative Gabe Vasquez.

A Direct Attack on Native Self-Determination

The Trump administration's FY2026 budget proposal calls for eliminating Section 166 and folding its funding into a single block grant known as "Make America Skilled Again" (MASA)—a plan that would consolidate 11 federal workforce programs under state control.

If enacted, the plan would:

- Strip Tribes and Native nonprofits of direct access to job training and education funds;
- Force Native communities to compete with states for resources;
- Undermine the culturally competent and community-rooted services that have proven successful for decades.

“This is a direct threat to Tribal sovereignty and our ability to serve our own people,” **said Darius Lee Smith, Executive Director for NPAC.** “DINAP and Section 166 are not broken—they’re models of what works. We need more investment in Native-led programs, not elimination.”

Three Critical Areas for Congressional Action

In her letters to House leadership, Edmo outlined three urgent recommendations:

1. Restore at least \$60 million in FY2026 funding for Section 166 Native workforce grants—consistent with FY2024 and FY2025 levels.
2. Protect the Division of Indian and Native American Programs (DINAP) within the Department of Labor, which has been gutted to just three staff members and plays a critical role in program compliance, performance tracking, and cultural oversight.
3. Preserve the Native American Employment and Training Council (NAETC), which is mandated by law to facilitate consultation between Tribes and the Department of Labor.

“DINAP has safeguarded Native job programs since the 1970s—long before DEI became a policy,” **said Edmo.** “We cannot allow decades of infrastructure, trust, and performance to be erased with the stroke of a budget pen.”

House Appropriations Possible Vote As Soon as September 2

The full House Appropriations Committee is set to mark up the Labor-HHS-Education budget on July 24, 2025. NPAC is urging immediate public pressure to stop the funding rollback before it reaches the floor.

NPAC calls on Tribal leaders, advocates, and allies nationwide to:

- Contact their members of Congress today and demand the protection of WIOA Section 166.
- Spread the word before September 2 to prevent devastating cuts to Native workforce programs.

“We’re not just fighting for a program—we’re fighting for the right to design and deliver solutions in our own communities,” **Smith said.** “Congress must listen.”

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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.