

DOI SELF-GOVERNANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

c/o Self-Governance Communication and Education

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August 13, 2018

The Honorable Tara Mac Lean Sweeney
Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Office of Self-Governance – Workforce Planning Strategies

Dear ASIA Sweeney:

On behalf of the Self Governance Advisory Committee (SGAC), I write this letter to request that you make the implementation of workforce planning strategies—such as succession planning, workforce right-sizing, and addressing gaps—a key priority.

Succession Planning. In a June 2018 hearing, Senator Tom Udall, Vice-Chairman for the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, stated that 40 percent of the Department of the Interior (DOI) employees will be eligible to retire within the next 5 years. Without effective succession plans and strategies for the transfer of knowledge, when these employees retire they will take with them valuable institutional knowledge. I recently learned that the Office of Self-Governance (OSG) does not have a succession plan or a strategy to identify leadership competencies among existing employees. Without a strategy to identify and develop successors who are the right people, with the right skills, the loss of these employees will be detrimental to Tribal Nations and can result in significant set-backs to programs.

I am especially concerned that OSG's organizational structure does not include a Deputy Director—a position that would help to provide for the continuity of operations when the current Director leaves the position. I request that a Deputy Director position be added to OSG's structure and that the position be filled as soon as possible.

Right-sizing the Workforce. OSG has a small workforce of 14 people who each serve a critical role in supporting the 270 Self-Governance Tribes. For decades, tribal leaders have raised concerns that additional resources are needed in order for OSG to effectively carry out its responsibilities. The number of Tribes entering into Self-Governance continues to increase; yet, Indian Affairs has no process in place to ensure OSG's workforce is the right size to meet current and future needs. In order for OSG to fulfill its responsibilities to Self-Governance Tribes—nearly half of all Federally-recognized tribes—it must have the right number of people with the right skills. I request that Indian Affairs develop a strategy that ensures workforce size within OSG aligns with its responsibilities and growing needs as more tribes pursue Self-Governance.

Workforce Gaps. I am also concerned that knowledge gaps and understaffing in key functions within OSG and BIA are hindering their ability to fulfill obligations agreed upon in compacts, contracts and agreements with Tribal Nations. For example, BIA is not properly staffed in the category of *Awarding Official* to ensure funds are disbursed for Self-Governance compacts and Self-Determination contracts in accordance with timeframes agreed upon under annual funding agreements. The terms agreed upon in our compacts, contracts, and funding agreements are not suggestions or goals to work towards. These are responsibilities and obligations negotiated between and agreed upon by the United States and Tribal Nations. Beyond Awarding Officials, other key positions within the agency remain vacant—including Regional Directors, Budget Officers, and Departmental Directors. I request that Indian Affairs prioritize efforts to address workforce gaps at OSG and BIA in key functions, such as those I mentioned.

The lack of workforce planning within Indian Affairs has been a long-standing management shortcoming. I am hopeful that under your leadership there will be increased attention on the need for improved management practices. I also understand that undertaking efforts to address long-standing management shortcomings require significant resources and I ask that you work in collaboration with and seek input from Tribal Nations as plans are put in place to resolve these management challenges. Tribes are in the best position to assist the bureau identify gaps in key workforce functions, such as those highlighted earlier in this letter.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns and recommendations on this very important topic. If you have any questions or would like to speak further on these issues, please contact Jay Spaan, Executive Director, Self-Governance Communication and Education (SGCE) Tribal Consortium at jays@tribalselfgov.org or (918) 302-0252

Sincerely,



W. Ron Allen, Chair, DOI-SGAC
Tribal Chairman/CEO, Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe

CC: John Tahsuda, III, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, DOI
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