



## Self-Governance Communication & Education Tribal Consortium

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Sent electronically [clhamon@usccr.gov](mailto:clhamon@usccr.gov)

December 22, 2020

The Honorable Catherine E. Lhamon  
Chairperson  
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights  
1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 1150  
Washington, DC 20425

Re: Report: COVID-19 Impacts on Tribal Nations

Dear Chairperson Lhamon:

On behalf of the Self-Governance Communication & Education Tribal Consortium (SGCETC), a non-profit Tribal organization that represents the interests of more than 360 Tribal Nations that elect to administer Federal programs and services to their citizens through Self-Governance agreements with the Federal government, we are concerned with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' (USCCR) decision not to release its report on "COVID-19 Impacts on Tribal Nations". We request that you share your reasons for not releasing a publication that you compiled following extensive outreach to Indian Country. We believe it is critically important for information provided to USCCR from Tribal leaders and officials on how the worse pandemic in 100 years continues to impact our homelands, citizens and economy, is released publicly.

We appreciate the previous publications by the USCCR which shared with the world the Federal funding inequities and unmet needs in Indian Country. We have not had many advocates of your magnitude to help Tribal Nations inform and educate others about the broken promises the U.S. has made to American Indian and Alaska Native people - the USCCR has by far been one of the most renowned entities to do so.

The Federal government, as the USCCR has well documented, has never fulfilled its trust and treaty obligations and responsibilities to Tribal Nations and their citizens. This failure is contributing to the disproportionate devastation that COVID-19 is having on American Indians and Alaska Natives. In addition, our Federal trustee continues to request inadequate appropriations to fulfill the needs of our people. So, there is little to wonder how we are expected to survive, operate and care for our citizens and communities when we have never received adequate funding to operate and administer our Tribal programs even during non-pandemic times.

When Congress appropriated coronavirus funding to assist Tribes, the Federal trustee did not rapidly distribute the funding. Instead, throughout the worse times of the pandemic, they hindered the distribution process and we were left to read Federal agencies' questions and answers (FAQ's) posted on their websites to determine how we would receive and should spend the funding. As a result of the bureaucratic lag, valuable time was wasted. We cannot afford to waste any more time given the lives of our people are at stake.

The Commission’s mission “is to inform the development of national civil rights policy and enhance enforcement of federal civil rights laws.” One of the means used to execute this mission is “publishing significant studies and reports on a wide range of the civil rights issues, that typically include findings and recommendations, to inform and advise policy makers.” Billy Frank Jr., the foremost advocate for the restoration of American Indian fishing rights in the Pacific Northwest was often asked by people how he got up every day and so effectively advocated for Tribal treaty rights and he would always respond the same way, “Tell your story.” Tribal leaders from across the U.S. told the Commission their stories and in doing so conferred upon the Commission the responsibility of sharing those stories with policy makers to effectuate real change for our people. The Commission’s role is vital in changing the story of our people from one of genocide, forced removal, oppression, and broken promises to one of resilience, achievement, and contribution.

We do not know what is in the publication or why USCCR has decided not to release it, but those stories rightfully belong to Tribal leaders and were shared with the Commission for a purpose. We therefore urge you to share your report, “our stories”, and let Congress and the country hear about the impacts Indian Country has incurred throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you have questions or would like to discuss the contents of this request in further details, please do not hesitate to contact Jay Spaan, Executive Director, SGCETC at [jays@tribalselfgov.org](mailto:jays@tribalselfgov.org) or (918) 370-4258. Thank you.

Sincerely,



W. Ron Allen, Tribal Chairman/CEO  
Jamestown S’Klallam tribe  
Chairman of the Board, SGCETC