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September 10, 2015

The Honorable Raul M. Grijalva
1511 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Grijalva:

On behalf of the Pueblo of Zuni, I want to thank you for your support of Indian Country over these many years. Specifically, for introducing HR 3166, the Native American Suicide Prevention Act.

HR 3166 is an important step in helping Indian Country deal with the terrible problem of suicide, especially amongst our youth. Your bill is a key component in the strategy of preventing suicide in Native American communities which have been disproportionately affected by this mental and public health issue. You will be happy to know that I sent letters to the entire New Mexico Congressional delegation urging their support and cosponsorship of this important legislation. However, I would also like to offer further assistance as the Pueblo of Zuni has been effectively dealing with this issue for many years.

Like many Native American Tribes, the Pueblo of Zuni has experienced a high rate of suicide, particularly among our youth. Between 1980 and 1987 the Pueblo of Zuni experienced 13 deaths prompting us to reach out to Dr. Teresa LaFromboise from the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University. Dr. LaFromboise, along with several graduate students from Stanford, assisted us in building a suicide prevention program for our high school students. Dr. LaFromboise worked with the school administration to develop the Zuni Life Skills Development program. The success of this program led to the American Indian Life Skills curriculum or AILS.

The American Indian Life Skills curriculum is based on seven core areas:

1. Building self-esteem
2. Identifying emotions and stress
3. Increasing communication and problem-solving skills
4. Recognizing and eliminating self-destructive behavior
5. Learning about suicide
6. Role-playing around suicide prevention and learning how to help a friend who is suicidal
7. Setting personal and community goals

These seven core areas make up the AILS curriculum and is designed to be administered to youth in 28 to 56 lessons. The high school-based curriculum is typically 30 weeks with students participating in lessons three times per week.

After numerous trials and evaluations, the American Indian Life Skills curriculum was granted the status of an evidence-based practice and is listed on SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices. The development of the American Indian Life Skills curriculum and Zuni Life Skills is among the first suicide-prevention programs designed for Native Americans.

Should HR 3166 receive a hearing before the appropriate Committee, I would like to offer up my assistance to you as a potential witness. I believe that Indian Country as a whole would benefit from learning about how the Pueblo of Zuni has been successfully dealing with this issue in a culturally sensitive way.

If you have any questions, you can contact me directly or my representative in Washington, Fred Starzyk at (202) 549-2363.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Val Panteah, Sr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Governor Val Panteah, Sr.
Pueblo of Zuni