

**Support Final Passage of the
Esther Martinez Native American Languages Program Reauthorization Act
(H.R. 912/S. 256)**

Cosponsors (54): Reps. Soto*, McCollum*, Young*, Haaland*, Cole*, Moore*, Norton*, Tipton*, DeFazio*, O'Halleran*, Grijalva*, Napolitano*, Davids*, Kildee*, Cardenas*, Torres Small*, Kind, Larsen, Case, Gabbard, Pocan, Cook, Kilmer, Adam Smith, McGovern, Khanna, Crist, Wild, Vargas, Lieu, Moulton, Courtney, Larson, Aguilar, Peterson, LaMalfa, Gallego, Ruiz, Horn, Dusty Johnson, Bass, Carbajal, Espaillat, Sires, Schakowsky, Sewell, Joyce, Bluemenuer, Krishnamoorthi, Kirkpatrick, Roybal-Allard, DelBene, Pallone, Rose.

Endorsed by: National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), Native American Rights Fund (NARF), National Indian Education Association (NIEA), Dual Language Education of New Mexico (DLeNM), Teach for America (TFA), National Coalition of Native American Language Schools (NANALS), National Joint Council for Languages and International Studies (NCLIS), National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE), Linguistic Society of America (LSA), Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), California Language Teachers' Association (CLTA), Tanana Chiefs Conference, Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians, Mohegan Tribe, Navajo Nation Office of the President.

Dear Colleague,

I strongly urge you to act to safeguard Indigenous languages by cosponsoring the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Reauthorization Act (H.R. 912). The Senate companion championed by Sen. Tom Udall was favorably reported out of Committee and passed by a voice vote without amendment.

Named after a New Mexican Tewa teacher and storyteller known for her dedication to revitalizing her people's language, Esther Martinez Native American language grants provides opportunities for educators and tribal communities to assess, plan, develop, and implement projects that ensure the survival and continued vitality of Native languages. This legislation is vital to strengthen the linguistic heritage of First Americans in urban, rural, and tribal communities across the country.

Why is this legislation needed?

Native languages have shaped U.S. history. Indigenous languages have shaped the Americas since time immemorial, and they continue to live on in our prayers, books, laws, and histories. Beginning with the formation of Native Nations and sustained through relations with foreign entrepreneurs, these languages are what sustain traditions and identities that are integral to the United States. The oldest printed newspaper in the U.S. was printed in Cherokee. In both world wars, Native American soldiers known as "Code Talkers" used tribal languages to transmit coded tactical messages. The inclusion of Nahuatl in urban school curricula has played a pivotal role in Latinx, Chicano, and Hispanic efforts to reassert their linguistic and cultural heritage in public schools and spaces. Native languages are all around us, and it is essential we honor their vital role in society by ensuring federal support for their sustenance.

Native languages encourage community resilience. Native language programs reaffirm that Indigenous languages are valuable and valid tools for community resilience and epistemological diversity. This reaffirmation increases the self-efficacy of Native language-learners – two important factors that research says improve student academic outcomes and executive functioning skills. In addition, language programs bring youth together with community leaders and cultural mentors, in line with two generation (2Gen) approaches to community-building. When youth have at least one role-model, research has shown that they are more likely become leaders in their communities.

Native languages are part of the federal trust responsibility to federally-recognized tribes. In exchange for lands acquired through treaties, land settlements, and other means, the U.S. government maintains a unique legal and political relationship with Tribes and their citizens based on a promise to provide certain services and respect Tribes as domestically-dependent sovereigns. Part of this relationship is contingent on the protection of Tribes' health, education, lands, economic autonomy, and other public services, including cultural property and languages. Experts estimate that all of the approximately 148 Native languages that are still spoken are at risk of extinction within the next 50 to 100 years. The loss of these languages would deal a significant blow to our shared American and global heritage, but tribal communities are fighting to reverse this devastating trend.

Esther Martinez language programs have had a significant impact on Indian Country and Alaska Native, Oklahoma, and urban Indigenous communities. Biennial evaluations by the Department of Health and Human Service, where the programs are housed, show that grantees increase the abilities of more than 4,000 youth and adults to speak a Native language on a yearly basis. These same grantees train 170-280 Native language teachers each year.

Bill Summary

H.R. 912/S. 256 – The Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Reauthorization Act would:

- Reauthorize through FY2024 both Esther Martinez grant programs administered by the Administration for Native Americans at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) – this includes the Native American Languages Preservation and Maintenance (P&M) grant program and the Esther Martinez Initiative (EMI) grant program
- Make program benefits available to more communities by decreasing the minimum number of enrollees from 10 to 5 in language nest program, and from 15 to 10 enrollees in survival school programs
- Increase the maximum possible grant period of all Esther Martinez grants from 3 to 5 years
- Increase authorized appropriations from \$5 million to \$13 million

To become a cosponsor of H.R. 912, the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Reauthorization Act, or for further information, please contact Alanna Purdy in my personal office (Alanna.Purdy@mail.house.gov or 5-0955).

Sincerely,

Rep. Ben Ray Luján

Member of Congress