

STEVE DAINES
MONTANA

320 HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-2651

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2606

COMMITTEES
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL
RESOURCES
FINANCE
INDIAN AFFAIRS

October 20, 2020

The Honorable Steve Bullock
Governor, State of Montana
Office of the Governor
PO Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620-0801

Governor Bullock:


I write concerning a troubling audit by the Montana State Legislative Audit Division regarding Montana's distribution of resources to one of our most vulnerable populations, our tribes. Indian Country has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is alarming that Montana's tribal governments have received less than \$600,000 of the state's Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) allocation provided by the CARES Act, which was intended to help all Montanans. In particular, based on the report, the Crow Tribal Government has received zero dollars from Montana's CRF allocation. I urge you to coordinate with tribal leaders to ensure our tribes are treated fairly and receive a proportional amount of aid from Montana's CRF distribution.

While I successfully fought for tribal parity in the CARES Act and helped secure \$8 billion for tribal governments that does not mean that states are relieved of their obligations to help tribal governments located within the state defeat this virus, and that includes Montana. According to a report from earlier this year, Montana's native population consists of 7% of the state's residents, yet makes up roughly one third of overall COVID-19 deaths in our state.^[1] Earlier this month, I met directly with tribal leaders and heard serious concerns about COVID-19 in their communities and the clear lack of communication on the process required to obtain any assistance from the State.

Crow Chairman A.J. Not Afraid recently stated, "Whatever relief tribal governments received and regardless of the adequacy or not of those monies, that is not a reason for Governor Bullock to nearly entirely exclude ten percent of Montanans from relief Congress intended for all Montanans." As an author of the tribal CARES Act provisions it was not intended for a state to neglect its responsibility to support all of the people residing in it, especially vulnerable populations like Montana tribes. It is disappointing that a lack of communication has led to a disparity in the amount of relief each tribal government has received. We simply cannot let bureaucracy stand in the way of much needed aid.

Aid and resources sent for the benefit of Montanans and to combat this virus should go to everyone residing in Montana, including Native Montanans. I urge you to reverse course and ensure Montana's tribes are treated equitably compared to the rest of our state.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator