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August 4, 2026

The Honorable Senator John Hoeven
U.S. Senate
338 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

***RE: Seeking Support for No-Cost Tribal College and University "1994" Farm Bill Priorities, Which Will Help Support Food Security and Drive Rural Prosperity in*** *North Dakota*

Dear Senator Hoeven,

I, President Tomi Kay Phillips, on behalf of Sitting Bull College (SBC), write to uplift two (2) categories of urgent no-cost Farm Bill priorities for Tribal Colleges and Universities (also known as "1994 land-grant institutions" or simply "1994s"):

1) Including equipment, facilities, and land acquisition as allowable uses within the 1994 Research program and the 1994 Extension program; and
2) Waiving the non-federal match requirement for 1994 institutions for the Research Facilities Act program and for the New Beginnings for Tribal Students program.

At SBC, we pride ourselves on the important agricultural research we undertake, the vital extension services we provide, and the significant positive economic impacts attributed to our institution. In 2023 alone, SBC alumni contributed $15.2 million to the Standing Rock Reservation economy - the equivalent of supporting 204 jobs.

As described below, these commonsense technical changes are urgently needed in order to help level the playing field for 1994 land-grant institutions and, in so doing, strengthen the Tribal and rural communities in North Dakota that we serve. As the Senate Agriculture Committee prepares for a markup of the Farm Bill, I respectfully ask you to champion these commonsense, no-cost provisions for 1994s.

Finally, SBC is a member of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) and, through this membership, is a member of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) as well as the Native Farm Bill Coalition

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(NFBC). SBC appreciates the support of AIHEC, APLU, and NFBC for these urgently needed, no-cost Farm Bill priorities.

***Include equipment, facilities, and land acquisition as allowable uses within the 1994 Research program and the 1994 Extension program***

1994 institutions have very few sources of funds for the mission-critical equipment, facilities, and land needed to carry out our agricultural research and extension programs. 1994 institutions are the first line of defense against harmful and invasive species impacting food security in our Tribal and rural communities, but unlike other land-grant institutions, 1994 land-grant institutions do not have large federal construction/facility grant programs or forgivable loan programs. Within USDA, the only dedicated 1994 construction program is an $8 million line item for community facilities, which is the only program to support all 35 1994 institutions, and it is limited to $250,000 per institution.

Without the flexibility to use our 1994 Research and 1994 Extension program funds for the very equipment, facilities, and land needed to carry out these vital programs, we are severely limited in the programmatic work that we can do. Restrictions on using research and extension funds for equipment, facilities, and land have limited Sitting Bull College's ability to develop field trials, modernize research tools, establish demonstration sites, and respond quickly to stakeholder needs. Greater flexibility would allow Sitting Bull College to purchase specialized equipment, improve research infrastructure, and secure land for long-term experiments and extension demonstrations. These investments would strengthen data quality, increase research capacity, accelerate technology transfer, and provide producers with more timely, locally relevant recommendations that enhance the impact of both my research and extension programs.

Encouragingly, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 7567, the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026, on April 30, 2026, and included provisions to allow 1994 institutions to use our 1994 Research and 1994 Extension funds for equipment to carry out these programs. We were disappointed, however, to see that the Senate Agriculture Committee discussion draft only proposes to include equipment as an eligible use for 1994 Research, but not for 1994 Extension. We were also disappointed to see that the discussion draft fails to include facilities and land as eligible uses of funds for either program. In order to advance the agricultural services and land-grant mission of our institution, we respectfully request a provision to include equipment, facilities, and land acquisition as

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allowable uses within the 1994 Research program and the 1994 Extension program.

***Waive the non-federal match requirement for 1994s for the Research Facilities Act program and the New Beginnings for Tribal Students program***

1994 institutions also have limited sources of funds with which to meet the non-federal match required for the Research Facilities Act program and for the New Beginnings for Tribal Students program. While both of these programs are *theoretically* open to all land-grant institutions, 1994 institutions might as well not be eligible because the non-federal match requirements pose an insurmountable barrier for us. Unlike other some other land-grant institutions, 1994 institutions lack extensive alumni donor networks and receive little, if any, state support, despite being open to all students, regardless of their Tribal citizenship.

For example, the New Beginnings for Tribal Students program is designed to increase the retention and graduation rate of Tribal students attending land-grant institutions. Yet, very few 1994 land-grant institutions are able to participate because we simply lack the non-federal funds to meet the match requirement. The non-federal matching requirement is a significant barrier to Sitting Bull College's participation in the New Beginnings for Tribal Students program. As a Tribal-serving institution with limited discretionary resources, identifying eligible matching funds often diverts resources from direct student support and program development. Without the burden of meeting the match requirement, we could expand access to culturally responsive academic support, strengthen student mentoring and advising, develop bridge and retention programs, enhance career readiness opportunities, and increase partnerships with Tribal communities and employers. Eliminating the match requirement would allow us to focus resources on improving recruitment, retention, graduation, and workforce outcomes for Tribal students, ensuring that program funds are directed where they have the greatest impact—supporting student success and strengthening educational opportunities for Tribal communities.

In recognition of this impediment, the Senate Appropriations Committee included report language accompanying the FY 2026 Agriculture appropriations bill to waive the non-federal match requirement for 1994s for the New Beginnings for Tribal Students program (just for FY 2026). H.R. 7567 includes a provision to make this permanent. Unfortunately, the Senate Agriculture Committee discussion draft leaves this important provision out. To ensure that there is a level playing field so that all land-grant institutions have the chance to access the New

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Beginnings for Tribal Students program, we respectfully request the inclusion of a provision to waive the non-federal match requirement for 1994 institutions.

1994 institutions have similar concerns around the non-federal match requirement for the Research Facilities Act program. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, enacted last year, includes $125 million of mandatory funding for the Research Facilities Act annually. As already described in this letter, 1994 institutions struggle significantly to secure funding for appropriate facilities in which to conduct our agricultural research. If the Research Facilities Act were to be amended to remove the non-federal match requirement for 1994 institutions, the Research Facilities Act program could be a viable opportunity to build the kinds of research facilities that our Tribal and rural communities desperately need. The match prohibits, Sitting Bull College from hiring additional personnel to assist with research activities, as our current personnel that are capable of completing research are maxed out with additional duties.

Encouragingly, H.R. 7567 includes report language acknowledging these concerns for 1994 institutions and encouraging the U.S. Department of Agriculture to "evaluate existing challenges to institutions having meaningful access to these funding opportunities and to provide recommendations on how access may be improved". To ensure that there is a level playing field so that all land-grant institutions have the chance to access the $125 million per fiscal year in mandatory funding, we respectfully request the inclusion of a provision to waive the non-federal match requirement for 1994 institutions.

In closing, Sitting Bull College respectfully requests that you champion the inclusion of these two (2) categories of no-cost Farm Bill provisions to help protect food security and drive rural prosperity in North Dakota.

For more information, please contact Moriah O'Brien, Vice President of Congressional and Federal Relations of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, at MOBrien@aihec.org.

Respectfully,

Tomi Kay Phillips, PhD
President
Sitting Bull College