



NATIONAL JOHNSON-O'MALLEY ASSOCIATION

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**Open Letter to President Barack Obama
From Carla Mann, President
National Johnson-O'Malley Association
The Obama Blueprint for Reform of Indian Education**

Dear Mr. President,

The National Johnson-O'Malley Association (NJOMA) applauds you and the Departments of Education and Interior for your much needed attention to Indian education and your proposals to reform the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). We are excited to see your Administration finally begin to address the inequities experienced by Indian children and hope that your first steps towards reforms to fix the BIE system will indeed strengthen tribal self-determination and improve educational activities for our future generations.

We also agree that the federal government's continued acceptance of the deplorable educational facilities and programs for Indian children is unacceptable. It is nonetheless regrettable that I must tell you that NJOMA is extremely disappointed that the focus of your BIE and Indian education reforms only focus on one aspect of Indian education—BIE funded schools, which only represent approximately 10 percent of all Indian students nationwide. The majority of Indian students attend public schools and your proposals fail to address their ever increasing needs. Sadly, but respectfully, we believe that your proposals miss the target in truly meeting the needs of Indian children because they avoid any actions to reform and fully fund the Johnson-O'Malley program (JOM) that provides supplemental educational services to nearly 800,000 Indian students in public schools across this Nation.

We are quite frankly, at a total loss as to why you would request that Congress fully fund the operational costs for the tribally controlled schools in the fiscal 2016 budget on the basis of the BIE and Tribal school systems needing reform without making a similar request for JOM, which is the only supplemental Indian education program that addresses the specialized and unique needs of Native students attending public schools. Since 1994, there has been no student count conducted for JOM, and as a result, funding for the program has failed to keep pace with the unimagined growth in the Native American school-aged population and the cost of delivering desired supplemental services to these students.

According to the most reliable numbers available from the 2010 Census, there are at least 798,000 Indian and Alaskan Native students attending public schools today. Because of bureaucratic fumbling and Administration neglect, JOM's student count has been frozen at 278,000 students since 1994. Funding for the program has never received above \$24 million, which provides approximately \$76 worth of services per year for every Indian student- well below the \$135-\$145 per student allocations for non-Indian students under other federal

educational programs of the same nature. **The Senate Indian Affairs Committee stated in its 2012 Report accompanying S. 1262 (Senate Report 112-262), “[that] currently, 620,000 or 93% of Native students attend public schools and approximately 45,000, or 7%, attend BIE schools.”** Unfortunately, by whatever measure you may choose to use, it is clear that there is a large number of JOM-eligible students being denied or deprived of services that they are legally entitled to, amounting to a failure of the Federal Government to meet its trust responsibility.

As you may know, Representatives Tom Cole (R-OK), Betty McCollum (D-MN) and Don Young (R-AK) have introduced the Johnson-O’Malley Supplemental Indian Education Program Modernization Act of 2014 (H.R. 4328) which will:

- Codify the operations of the JOM program that have become routine including current eligibility requirements;
- Authorize various program and eligibility modernizations to improve program access, coverage, and utilization;
- Provide a formal authorization for the Supplemental Indian Education Program and provide it the same legal standing as other education programs targeted to Native populations (e.g., Title VII, BIE Schools, and Tribal Colleges);
- Require the Secretary of Interior to use the proceeding year’s student count data when calculating awards;
- Establish a baseline funding level of \$125 per student per year for the program;
- Authorize tribes and school districts to form consortiums to carry out programming and training activities, and to partner with Tribal colleges and universities; and,
- Require the Secretary of Interior to provide an annual program assessment to the Congress as part of the Department's annual budget submission.

Mr. President, Indian country and America need the JOM Modernization Act. The available evidence shows that when Native students benefit and improve, entire School Districts improve as a result. Making JOM the program it has always been intended to be will help improve public education for Indian children and have positive impacts on the overall performance of public school districts that are themselves struggling to keep up with the costs of public education.

We are truly thankful that your Administration understands and wants to improve the schools that serve tens of thousands of Native American children. We pray that you’ll not leave the remaining 90 percent of our children behind.

Sincerely,

/s/

Carla Mann, President
National Johnson-O’Malley Association
Board of Directors

CC: Secretary Sally Jewell - Interior
Secretary Arne Duncan - Education
Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Kevin Washburn

Bill Mendoza –Director, White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education

Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT)

Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY)

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA)

Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN)

Sen. Kay Hagan (D-NC)

Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY)

Sen. Mark Begich (D-AK)

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)

Sen. Al Franken (D-MN)

Sen. Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND)

Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI)

Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS)

Rep. Doc Hastings (R-WA)

Rep. Don Young (R-AK)

Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR)

Rep. Colleen Hanabusa (D-HI)

Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID)

Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK)

Rep. Markwayne Mullin (R-OK)

Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN)

Rep. Jack Kingston (R-GA)

Rep. Jim Moran (D-VA)

Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)

Rep. John Kline (R-MN)

Rep. George Miller (D-CA)

Rep. Todd Rokita (R-IN)

Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY)

Mr. Kenneth Martin - Policy Director, Senate Indian Affairs Committee

Ms. Ahniwake Rose – Director, NIEA

Mr. Clint Bowers – NIEA

Ms. Jacqueline Johnson Pata –Executive Director, NCAI

Mr. Kitcki Carroll – Executive Director, USET