

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
Legislative Hearing
June 13, 2017

Written Testimony
Hawaii Congressional Delegation
S. 1275, the Bringing Useful Initiatives for Indian Development (BUIILD) Act of 2017

Chairman Hoeven and Vice Chairman Udall, please accept this written testimony in opposition to S. 1275, the Bringing Useful Initiatives for Indian Development (BUIILD) Act of 2017. While we have and continue to support reauthorizing the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (NAHASDA) programs, we strongly oppose this bill in its current form because it fails to include Native Hawaiian Housing Block Grants (NHHBG) and Section 184A Native Hawaiian Home Loan Guarantee programs, as set forth in Title VIII of NAHASDA.

The housing needs faced by our Native communities are among the worst in our country. In recognition of the federal government's trust responsibility to Native Americans, including Alaska Natives, Congress passed the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act in 1996. In 2000, the American Homeownership and Economic Opportunity Act of 2000¹ inserted Title VIII in NAHASDA and created the NHHBG and Section 184A programs to provide resources for affordable housing programs for Native Hawaiians, pursuant to the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920 (HHCA)².

HHCA recognizes the federal government's "unique trust responsibility to promote the welfare of the aboriginal, indigenous people of the State [of Hawaii]." ³ This law created the Hawaiian Home Land Trust, which includes more than 200,000 acres of land managed by the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL). The purpose of the HHCA is to improve the lives of Native Hawaiians, who continue to be more economically disadvantaged and lag behind in education and health, compared to other Hawaii residents. The trust lands create a land base where beneficiaries are able to reestablish connections to their native lands and cultural traditions that are vital in maintaining their identity and foundation.

While many Native Hawaiian families benefit from the HHCA, there are a large number of low-income families who are unable to take advantage of these lands because obtaining and managing a property is not within their financial means. To put this into perspective, DHHL recently reported that there were more than 27,000 applicant families on the waitlist to reside on

¹ Public Law 106-569

² The Hawaiian Homes Commission Act was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Warren Harding on July 9, 1921.

³ Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920, §201.5

Hawaiian homesteads and the latest U.S. Census numbers indicate that approximately 16.8 percent of Native Hawaiians live in poverty in the State of Hawaii.⁴ The NHHBG and Section 184A programs are crucial in bridging the gap between low-income Native Hawaiian families and their ability to live on homestead lands.

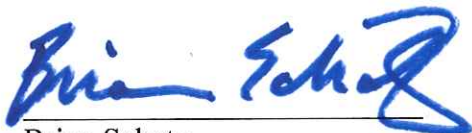
Congress has recognized the special relationship between the U.S. government and Native Hawaiians, and a responsibility to continue promoting programs that counter these sobering figures. NAHASDA's Title VIII programs provide vital tools that promote safe and affordable housing for Native Hawaiians. Healthy, sustainable homeownership is also fostered through the provision of funds for direct loans, housing counseling, self-help housing, and home rehabilitation programs. These resources focus on developing strong communities that serve as foundations for Native Hawaiian families to improve their collective quality of life.

In 2015, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation to reauthorize NAHASDA with overwhelming bipartisan support. Also in 2015, this committee favorably reported a Senate version to reauthorize NAHASDA. Both versions included improvements to allow for NAHASDA programs to have a greater ability to self-determine – as is stated in the title of the law we are discussing – how to efficiently meet local housing needs. To abandon this bipartisan progress and Title VIII entirely – as the BUIILD Act does – would be a grave mistake and disservice to our Native communities. This is simply not the way forward.

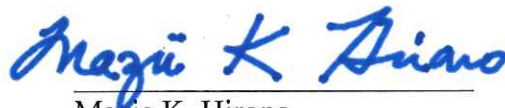
It is incumbent upon Congress to continue to acknowledge our responsibility to protect and improve the lives of Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, which the BUIILD Act, in its present form, does not do. As such, we urge members of this committee to oppose the BUIILD Act and to continue to work to improve on the progress made on NAHASDA reauthorization in the last several years.

We look forward to working with this committee on how we can continue to work toward meeting the dire housing needs of all our Native people.

Sincerely,



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Colleen Hanabusa
Member of Congress



Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Selected Population Profile in the United States, Hawaii

http://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/census/acs/ACS2015/ACS2015_1_Year/Select_Pop_Profiles/major_race_aoc.pdf