

YouthBuild USA



National American Indian Housing Council

Press Release

December 20, 2005



Media Contacts:

National American Indian Housing Council

Ross Bell
202-454-0928, rbell@naihc.net
Kim Hayes
202-454-0931, khayes@naihc.net

YouthBuild USA

Sharistan Melkonian
617-741-1271, smelkonian@youthbuild.org
Bruce Curliss
617-741-1206, bcurliss@youthbuild.org

**CONGRESS PASSES LEGISLATION TO GIVE NATIVE AMERICANS ACCESS
TO FEDERAL HOUSING AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FUNDS**

WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 20, 2005) – This week, Congress passed the **Native American Housing Enhancement Act of 2005 (H.R. 797)**. This legislation prohibits the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development from restricting **tribes' access to Native American Housing Block Grant (NAHBG) funds due to retained program income, clarifies tribal preference under the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (NAHASDA), and allows tribes to apply for YouthBuild funds**. The **National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC)** and **YouthBuild USA** strongly supported the passage of this bill. The bill is now ready for President Bush to sign into law.

H.R. 797 expands housing grant opportunities for tribes by reducing technical barriers in accessing NAHBG funds. The act clarifies that the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development cannot reduce the amount of NAHBG funds based solely on the technical status of a tribe's income from NAHASDA programs.

Earlier this fall, **H.R. 797** passed unanimously in the Senate, led by **Senators Michael Enzi (R-WY)** and **Tim Johnson (D-SD)**.

“Housing conditions in these areas do not meet the threshold of what I would hope to find in America in the 21st century,” said **Senator Enzi**. “YouthBuild helps build foundations for homes as well as foundations for young adults to become community leaders. I am pleased that tribes will now be eligible to participate in this valuable program. I am hopeful the opportunities that will be afforded people through this legislation will make a dent. This bill is designed to ‘treat’ the problem on multiple levels. The unemployed are provided valuable experience and skills; more housing is built and improved for low-income individuals. The improvements benefit the whole community through pride of ownership and accomplishment.”

“Native Americans, including those in my home state of South Dakota, experience some of the worst housing conditions in the country,” said **Senator Johnson**. “With the passage of this legislation, tribes will be able to access YouthBuild grants allowing at-risk youth to acquire valuable job skills by building affordable housing for low-income families, while pursuing a high school degree or GED. This bill gives tribes the flexibility they need to have greater control over their housing needs and plans. After all, tribes know best what their specific housing needs are. I look forward to the President signing this bill into law.”

NAIHC worked closely with **Congressman Rick Renzi (R-AZ)**, **Congressman Jim Matheson (D-UT)**, **Congressman Nick J. Rahall II (D-WV)**, **Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD)**, and **Senator Michael Enzi (R-WY)** to pass **H.R. 797**. The Act reduces technical barriers that exist in current law inhibiting the tribe’s ability to access funding sources and programs that benefit Indian communities and improve tribal housing programs.

“This bill will help give Native Americans in rural Arizona, and across the nation, the tools they need to better utilize federal housing programs and plan for the future,” said **Congressman Renzi**. “I am especially pleased to see the YouthBuild program reinstated to help teach life skills to at-risk youth. This program not only provides these young people with an opportunity to improve themselves, it allows them to assist their communities by building new housing for needy families.”

“Substandard housing is far too common on the Navajo reservation in Utah,” said **Congressman Matheson**, a member of the House Financial Services Committee, which oversees housing. “We need to do whatever we can to give people the opportunity to move into safe, decent homes. This legislation is a step in that direction.”

Enhancing Housing Opportunities

H.R. 797 also makes amendments to housing programs for Indian tribes that are administered by the Department of Agriculture. Authorized under the Housing Act of 1949, these programs are subject to the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968, which prohibit discrimination of housing programs based on race, color, or national origin. Due to the nature of federally recognized tribes serving Indian communities, **H.R. 797** clarifies that the housing programs under the Department of Agriculture shall be administered by the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968, consistent with NAHASDA.

NAIHC Chairman Chester Carl and Executive Director Gary L. Gordon both praised the new law. “YouthBuild is a program that will help tribal economies grow by developing job skills for Indian youth on tribal lands. The program income provision is a major step for tribes, improving their flexibility and ability to achieve long-term development goals by building financial portfolios.”

Supporting Tribal Youth

H.R. 797 revises the **Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act** to make YouthBuild program funds available for tribes and organizations that serve tribal communities.

Tribes had been prohibited from applying for YouthBuild program funds by the passage of NAHASDA in 1996.

In **YouthBuild**, low-income young people ages 16-24 work toward their GED or high school diploma while learning job skills by **building affordable housing for homeless and low-income people in their community**. Since 1994, **YouthBuild** has expanded to more than 225 local programs, and 54,000 youth have produced 14,000 units of affordable housing. There is one tribal YouthBuild program and eight programs serving tribal youth operating today in Alaska, Arizona, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, and South Dakota.

Native youth comprise only 1 percent of the general U.S. population, yet they are highly and disproportionately represented in all categories of risk. For example:

- The dropout rate for Native Americans is 35.5%, twice the U.S. national average, and the highest dropout rate for any U.S. ethnic or racial group.
- Native youth ages 12-20 are 58% more likely to become crime victims than their non-Native peers.

“Despite these heartbreaking statistics, research also shows that tribal communities possess distinct strengths that can be harnessed to support young people in **YouthBuild** programs,” said **Dorothy Stoneman, founder and president of YouthBuild USA**. “We are thrilled that Native youth will no longer be denied the opportunity to participate in one of the country’s most successful youth development programs. There is a high level of interest in YouthBuild from tribal governments, housing authorities, and nonprofit organizations that are eager to bring this program – and its successful track record – to their Native communities.”

From 2000 to 2004, 88 percent of **YouthBuild** students entered the program without their GED or diploma, 32 percent had been adjudicated, and 28 percent received public assistance prior to joining YouthBuild. In spite of these overwhelming odds, 59 percent completed the program and 80 percent of graduates went on to college or jobs averaging \$8.15/hour.

###

*The **National American Indian Housing Council** (www.naihc.net) assists tribes and tribal housing entities in reaching their self-determined goals of providing culturally relevant, decent, safe, sanitary, and quality affordable housing for Native people in Indian communities and Alaska Native villages.*

***YouthBuild USA** (www.youthbuild.org) is a nonprofit organization that works to increase the number of youth transitioning out of poverty by supporting a nationwide network of more than 225 local YouthBuild programs. YouthBuild USA also advocates for changes in public policy on issues that impact low-income young people, develops future leaders, and contributes knowledge and best practices to the greater youth development field worldwide.*