**SAMPLE LETTER TO CONGRESS**

**(LETTERHEAD)**

Enter Date

The Honorable (Full Name)

(Room #) (Name) (Senate or House) Office Building

United States (Senate or House of Representatives)

Washington, DC (20510 for Senate; 20515 for House)

RE: PRIORITIES TO IMPROVE TRIBAL HOUSING PROGRAMS

Dear (Senator or Congressman/woman):

My name is (Full Name) and I am a member of the (Enter Tribe) in (State). I currently serve as the (Job Title) for the (Tribe or Organization). Tribal communities across the country continue to see high levels of unmet need with respect to affordable housing opportunities. A 2017 HUD needs assessment in Indian Country found that 68,000 new units are needed to combat higher instances of overcrowded and/or substandard homes in tribal communities. Rates in Indian Country of housing with substandard electricity, plumbing and heating continue to remain well above national averages.

This year tribal housing professionals across the country, including myself, hope Congress can focus on three priorities:

***REAUTHORIZE NAHASDA!*** The Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act was enacted in 1996, and has been the cornerstone of federal/tribal housing policy for the past 20 years. However, its last reauthorization was in 2008 and expired in 2013. The Act must be reauthorized and should incorporate improvements that tribes have identified to maintain program effectiveness.

***FUND TRIBAL HOUSING PROGRAMS!*** NAHASDA programs have been nearly level-funded since it was first enacted in 1996. Under FY 2017 funding levels, tribes are operating with approximately two-thirds of the purchasing power they held when NAHASDA was first enacted. If the Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG) had been tied to inflation, tribes should be receiving approximately $915 million, but last year the IHBG received only $654 million. Even worse, the President’s FY 2019 budget request for the IHBG asks for only $600 million, which was the same amount received in 1998. Indian Country cannot provide quality housing opportunities with 20-year old funding levels! We ask that you support the IHBG by funding it at no less than $700 million this year. Other recommended funding levels can be found in the attached Briefing Paper put together by the National American Indian Housing Council.

***INCLUDE TRIBES IN THE FARM BILL!*** As Congress works to reauthorize the Farm Bill, we want to make sure that USDA programs are more effective in Indian Country. Specifically for housing, the Rural Development section 502 Direct Loan program needs to be amended to create tribal set-asides and authorize tribes or tribally-owned community development financial institutions (CDFIs) to act as lending intermediaries. In FY 2016, only 12 of over 7,000 direct loans issued by Rural Development went to Native Americans, despite the program designed to serve low-income families in rural areas.

Housing programs in Indian Country can only be effective when properly funded appropriately. We look forward to working with your office on these issues in the coming months and encourage your support in funding these programs.

Sincerely,

 (Your Name)

 (Job Title)