



August 24, 2020

The Honorable London Breed
Mayor, City of San Francisco
City Hall, Room 200
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

San Francisco Board of Supervisors
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, Room 244
San Francisco, CA, 94102

RE: American Indian Community Racial Equity and COVID-19 Budget Requests for Healing and Emergency Crisis Response in San Francisco

Dear Mayor Breed and San Francisco Board of Supervisors,

The American Indian Cultural District Board is writing to you today to bring your attention to the disproportionate and detrimental impacts of your funding cuts, the city's inaccurate data use, and insufficient political representation is having on the American Indian community. **We write this letter as protectors of our community and for our children's future, we cannot afford to be silenced anymore.**

We implore you to address the racial inequities that the City claims to be prioritizing. San Francisco needs to stop its willful neglect of the American Indian community and begin investing the resources and time to develop accurate data points and address the inequitable resource distribution during this time of crisis. **To start this process of racial equity and healing we demand the following:**

- 1. A meeting with the Mayor and the appropriate political bodies to begin the healing process and dismantle the present and historical structural and institutional racism facing American Indian people in San Francisco.**
- 2. Immediate action on the following urgent items:**

Funding:

1. Restore the initially proposed MOHCD grant funding to American Indian organizations in the amount of \$350,000 and *increase* funding to American Indian organizations in the four priority areas that were identified by the Mayor's most recent budget.
2. Require all your departments to share their investments in the American Indian community and provide intentional outreach to our community for request for proposals, research, and civic engagement.

3. Provide funding for American Indian arts and cultural projects that bring healing and create greater public awareness of the historical and modern contributions of Native American people to the culture of San Francisco and the Bay Area.

Policy:

1. Honor the First People of San Francisco, the Ramaytush Ohlone, by recognizing them and their land prior to all city meetings. Set engagement protocols in place for partnerships with American Indian leaders, elders, and organizations.
2. Revisit the 2006 Human Rights Commission *Oppression by Omission* document to evaluate the progress of HRC recommendations and community demands
3. Require your office and city departments to work with American Indian organizations to gather accurate data and require all agencies to start using census data measurements for the American Indian community that include raw census data for American Indians including those that identify as American Indian and another race.
4. Address the current lack of political representation and appoint American Indian representation at the leadership level in the Mayor's Office, on city boards, and commissions. Additionally, appoint an American Indian liaison to work with city departments, boards and commissions.
5. Consult with the American Indian community to identify and remove culturally inappropriate or offensive artwork, statues, and/or monuments that represent the conquest and genocide of the Native American people. Instead, take a pro-active approach and begin righting the wrongs and decolonize and indigenize this city.
6. The Commission and Board of Supervisors should honor and establish official recognition of Native American Heritage Month, California Native American Day, and Indigenous People's Day.

Land:

1. Donate city land for safe traditional and ceremonial gathering space, land for an American Indian Cultural Center, and for a community garden in the American Indian Cultural District.
2. Support American Indian community organizations in negotiating land permits, space growth for services and cultural activities.
3. Make a concerted effort to house Native people in San Francisco through BMR outreach, housing program partnership, priority placement and eviction prevention services

We need you to know:

We are on stolen Ohlone lands.

We stand in solidarity with our Black relatives.

We ask you to recognize that the Black Liberation and American Indian Self Determination are inextricably linked as a vast result of land and labor abuses. Today's BLM movement and AIM (American

Indian Movement - 1968) started in Minneapolis as a response to systematic injustice and police brutality.

We are still here even after 500 years of systematic cultural erasure. **Roughly 90% of American Indians live in urban centers** like San Francisco and we are homeless in our own backyard.

We are not going anywhere. San Francisco American Indian organizations have built a strong coalition with a national reach, completed a COVID-19 survey, and in less than two months we've established a COVID-19 Task Force.

We need recognition, housing, culturally appropriate health care, jobs, education, self-determination – and land to safely gather and heal as a community.

We are survivors of sovereign nations that have been left reeling from genocidal practices and we need those dispossessing/pushing us to the margins in our own lands to end their practices of obliteration.

We are heavily impacted by gentrification. We have lost 3,744 American Indian relatives in this city from 2000 to 2010.

We wish to be truly seen in our homelands, to become a resource to you as you seek to develop an agenda of living that is based our mutual/interlocking responsibility. Not upon a Doctrine of Discovery, manifest destiny, or a right to take.

We ask you to develop a healing agenda for your wrongful acts, and we wish to heal and in the process.

BACKGROUND

Making budget cuts to essential programs and services for the city's most vulnerable communities of color does not promote racial equity during a time of crisis. The following is a snapshot of why the American Indian community is the most at risk for experiencing severe symptoms of COVID-19 related to overall health, death, and suicide during this crisis.

- COVID-19 has a higher fatality rate among those with diabetes and heart disease.
- According to CDC, American Indians and Alaska Natives have a greater chance of having diabetes than any other US racial group and are disproportionately affected by stress-related illness, such as high blood pressure and depression.
- We experience the highest rates of violence, abuse, foster care, incarceration, AIDS, suicide, and premature death than other ethnicities/races in America.
- The national average life expectancy of American Indian males is 45 years of age and our youth are more likely to attempt suicide than any other racial or ethnic group in the US.
- According to the Native American Health Center, American Indians are more likely to seek health services and resources from an American Indian provider.

We request that the Mayor's Office and the Department of Public Health increase funding to American Indian urban health centers and health and wellness programs, not cut it.

Accessorized as A Priority Yet Inequitably Impacted by Funding Cuts

The Mayor's Office, the Human Rights Commission, the Office of Racial Equity, the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD), and the Planning Commission **have all indicated either verbally or in writing that the American Indian community is one of the “most vulnerable” and a “priority” yet we continue to face funding cuts to vital services even in this time of crisis.**

- MOHCD's recent RFP team did intentional outreach to the American Indian community and thus, we received modest and innovative proposals for our community organizations.
- Our American Indian orgs were awarded new and expanded grants. **However, from the first round of recommendations our total proposal awards were reduced by \$125,000.**
- American Indian Cultural District is the American Indian organizational coalition, a community voice, and COVID-19 Task Force for our people. **We requested \$150,00 in funding and were rewarded \$93,750**
- Friendship House Association of American Indians has been helping our families overcome substance abuse and serve our youth for over 50 years. **They requested \$325,000 and were rewarded \$68,813.**
- The Native American Health Center provides COVID-19 testing and emergency food delivery and has been providing medical, dental, behavioral health, diabetes, obesity, substance abuse prevention, HIV/HCV care since 1972. **They requested \$190,000 and were rewarded \$75,000.**
- Federal funding cuts that are also impacting the American Indian safety net. These cuts include the International Indian Treaty Council which provides COVID-19 webinars and food sovereignty anticipates **a \$75,000 loss.** The SFUSD Indian Education Program which serves our families and youth anticipates a **\$100,000 loss.**

Cutting our funding and our resources during this time cuts our voice, our visibility, and continues the narrative of government mandated erasure to a community that represents a miniscule fraction of the city budget.

Racial Inequity in Political Representation

American Indian's were not considered citizens until 1924 and **we were not guaranteed the right to vote in all US states until 1962.** We have faced five centuries of government attempted erasure including legislated murder, land termination, the systemic separation and destruction of Native families through missions and boarding schools, religious oppression, disproportionate incarceration, and urban relocation. **Today political erasure is one of the biggest threats to our visibility, access to resources, and existence as a people.**

In 2006 the San Francisco Human Rights Commission met with over 130 American Indian people to identify issues of concern for American Indians in San Francisco. This gathering resulted in the creation of a Native American Task Force (NATF) and a 105-page report by HRC titled: Discrimination by Omission. We intend to show how San Francisco continues this erasure through exclusion.

- The report findings noted that “Native American communities have been systematically excluded in conversations about racism. Native American people also feel left out of processes – that they are only seen as an afterthought, or that they are completely ignored and invisible – and that they lack a voice, even within communities of color in San Francisco.”
- Over a decade later, the realities described; “omission by oppression” have not changed. **The American Indian voice and representation does not exist in the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, in the Mayor's Office, in an appointed City capacity, or in the Human Rights Commission.**
- American Indians were not listed as a “priority community” in the COVID-19 Task Force Presentation.
- The Housing Policy Group and Planning presentations had either missing or inaccurate American Indians.

- In recent Racial Equity Resolutions by Planning and Historic Preservation our community had to advocate to not be mentioned last behind our Black and Latino relatives. **On our stolen lands, and out of respect for the very limited survivors, we are the starting point of historic racial inequity in the city and the United States.**
- American Indians are also one of the only communities of color in San Francisco who do not have a Historical Context Statement authored by the Planning Department.

The removal of the Christopher Columbus statue from Telegraph Hill is one of the most notable recent examples of exclusion from racial equity efforts, while claiming to support American Indian people.”

- The removal took place without engaging or consulting with the American Indian community. It was more about advancing a political image rather than healing or genuine acknowledgement.
- This exclusionary and painful action silenced our voices and denied us a gathering to heal from the removal of the racist symbol of injustice, exploitation, and genocide.
- Like previous monument removal efforts, this could have been done in a safe, respectful, and collaborative manner. **Even if the statue was removed quickly for safety you could have reached out to community representatives directly after, so we did not have to find out about it from the news.**
- Like all communities of color, American Indians need to be a part of conversations and plans that relate to future removals of public art works not just for racial equity but to heal generations of trauma.

As a small community, we feel like we're invisible and that our voices too often go unheard. When our civic leaders ignore our community's needs, they convey a message that we are invisible, and that we don't count.

Racial Inequity Through Inaccurate Data Use

Most people, including local policy makers are unaware that there over 150 federally and non-federally recognized tribes in California, that 90% of American Indians live in urban areas, and most importantly that the San Francisco Bay Area was one of the largest relocation centers for American Indian people in the US. **The city and the Mayor's Office use American Indian "only" census data which continues systematic erasure by not reflecting our true presence and inaccurately reflecting the people we serve.**

In the Mayor's current proposed budget under "racial identification" you need a magnifier to see that American Indians and Alaskan Natives "alone" make up 0.3% of the city's demographics **but the data you see here does not tell the true story of our presence.** Using American Indian "alone" racial data means you do not capture people of one or more races, this problematic for many reasons:

1. Census based racial or ethnic misclassifications were intentionally structured by the US government for American Indian erasure. Census data did not count American Indians as people for centuries, we were labeled as "white" or "other."
2. The census has excluded the American Indian option for non-enrolled American Indians and non-federally recognized tribes like our Ohlone relatives for decades.
3. Pew research shows that **prior to 1990 only single race responses were required** on the census. **Between 1990 and 2000 the size of the American Indian population doubled in the US from two million to four million because of the option to choose two or more races.**
4. With nearly five generations of land removal, relocation, slavery, boarding schools, and other forms of government mandated violence including genocide, **the reality is our community includes those who are multiracial. Every American Indian that lives today is survivor and they count.**

5. Our urban community organizations serve all American Indian people, not just those on the census box that mark “only” American Indian.
6. **When the city uses “Indigenous” as a racial indicator for funding and policy initiatives there is no clarity to show who this applies to. Indigenous is a global term that can apply to any community**, while not ideal American Indian and Native American are specific to our community and ensure we are not erased from policy and funding initiatives.
7. The data issue be easily remedied through American Indian engagement. The Planning team for the Housing Element 2022 update will be using American Indian data from the census that includes those who have checked American Indian/Alaskan Native and an additional race.

In a system where we lack true visibility and representation the most powerful tool for equitable resource distribution is dependent on accurate data capture. For accurate data capture we must stop using historically structured and racist instruments and acknowledge who the American Indian community is today and who we serve.

Closing Prayer

We write this letter with the intent to invoke urgent action on our requests and to start the healing process to help remedy the past and present injustices against American Indian people in this city.

We hope the background information outlining racial inequities will help bring awareness to our unique and compounded struggle. **We make up a miniscule proportion of the city budget.** The funds we are requested would serve our community are in the areas Mayor Breed has identified as a priority and they are critical to continue our COVID-19 response efforts for the American Indian community during this time of crisis.

We respectfully elevate our request to meet with the Mayor’s Office and any other appropriate entities over a virtual meeting to discuss this letter. Please feel free to contact us at americanindianculturaldistrict@gmail.com to arrange a meeting.

Thank you for your attention and consideration to these matters.

Sincerely,

American Indian Cultural District:

Sharaya Souza, Executive Director, American Indian Cultural District

April McGill, American Indian Cultural Center

Greg Castro, Association of Ramaytush Ohlone

Jackie Pierson, California Consortium for Urban Indian Health

Rose Goldberg, California Department of Justice

Peter Bratt, Friendship House Association of American Indians

Paloma Flores, Indian Education Program

Radley Davis, International Indian Treaty Council

Michelle Shawnego, Native American Health Center

Michelle Antone, Native American Health Center

Morning Star Gali, Restoring Justice for Indigenous Peoples

Melissa Nelson, The Cultural Conservancy

CC: Sandra Lee Fewer, Catherine Stefani, Aaron Peskin, Gordon Mar, Dean Preston, Matt Haney, Norman Yee, Rafael Mandelman, Hillary Ronen. Shann Walton, Ahsha Safai, Shakira Simley, Sherly Davis, Jaquin Torres, Eric Shaw, Dr. Grant Colfax, Maria Su

APPENDIX: COVID-19 American Indian Organization Data

The table below reflects the top needs and funding data from eight San Francisco Bay Area organizations that serve American Indians. The data suggests our organizations may receive as much as \$387,437 less in city funding than requested, and our federal organizations anticipate a \$175,000 total annual budget reduction.

ORGANIZATION	TOP NEEDS	MOHCD FUNDING REQUESTED	AUGUST AWARD RECCOMENDATION
AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURAL DISTRICT	Staff support for a Native American Community Coalition, the Indigenize Project, & COVID-19 Task Force efforts	\$150,000	\$93,750
AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURAL CENTER	Building/land space for a Cultural Center and ceremonial gatherings Funds for cultural healing programs and food delivery Funds for fulltime staff support	NA	NA
CALIFORNIA CONSORTIUM FOR URBAN INDIAN HEALTH	Funds for mental health staffing and services to meet increased demand Funds for food and housing security	NA	NA
FRIENDSHIP HOUSE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN INDIANS	Funds for mental health services Additional staff support for suicide prevention and recovery programing	\$325,000	\$68,813
INDIAN EDUCATION PROGRAM, TITLE VII	Staff for youth and family support Funds for traditional foods program Technology equipment and internet access for online youth education	*Estimated \$100,00 federal budget reduction	NA
INTERNATIONAL INDIAN TREATY COUNCIL	Funds /resources for community-based food sovereignty programs Communication infrastructures to present online	*Estimated \$75,000 federal budget reduction	NA
NATIVE AMERICAN HEALTH CENTER	Funds staff support COVID-19 testing support Support processing labs quickly	\$190,000	\$75,000
RESTORING JUSTICE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES	Personal protective equipment Accessible testing sites Free mental health services	NA	NA