

GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
OFFICE

DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
Denise A. Cardman  
(202) 662-1761  
cardmand@staff.abanet.org

SENIOR LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL  
R. Larson Frisby  
(202) 662-1098  
frisbyr@staff.abanet.org

Lillian B. Gaskin  
(202) 662-1768  
gaskinl@staff.abanet.org

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL  
Kristi Gaines  
(202) 662-1763  
gainesk@staff.abanet.org

Kenneth J. Goldsmith  
(202) 662-1789  
goldsmithk@staff.abanet.org

Kerry M. Lawrence  
(202) 662-1766  
lawrenck@staff.abanet.org

Ellen McBarnette  
(202) 662-1767  
mcbarnee@staff.abanet.org

E. Bruce Nicholson  
(202) 662-1769  
nicholsonb@staff.abanet.org

DIRECTOR GRASSROOTS  
OPERATIONS/LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL  
Julie M. Strandlie  
(202) 662-1764  
strandlj@staff.abanet.org

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY  
LAW CONSULTANT  
Hayden Gregory  
(202) 662-1772  
gregoryh@staff.abanet.org

STATE LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL  
Rita C. Aguilar  
(202) 662-1780  
aguilarr@staff.abanet.org

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT  
Julie Pasatiempo  
(202) 662-1776  
jpasatiempo@staff.abanet.org

STAFF DIRECTOR FOR  
INFORMATION SERVICES  
Sharon Greene  
(202) 662-1014  
greenes@staff.abanet.org

EDITOR WASHINGTON LETTER  
Rhonda J. McMillion  
(202) 662-1017

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION

Governmental Affairs Office

740 Fifteenth Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20005-1022  
(202) 662-1760  
FAX: (202) 662-1762

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Dear Senator:

For many years the health care needs of our nation's Native American and Alaska Native populations have been compromised by Congressional inaction. The 110<sup>th</sup> Congress has an opportunity to address this problem by reauthorizing the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCA) promptly. We applaud the Senate leadership for bringing reauthorization legislation, S. 1200 to the floor for a vote this week, and we urge your support for its passage.

For seven years the IHCA has lacked a full reauthorization and has existed on continuing resolutions. As a result, health care programs authorized under IHCA have remained substantially the same since their creation in 1976, although the state and quality of health care in the United States has changed dramatically. For example, use of comprehensive mental health, behavioral health and substance abuse treatment programs has evolved significantly, and there have been enormous advancements in community-based care protocols, medical information-sharing and communication technology that have transformed medical care. Programs reflecting modern practices in patient care management have not been made sufficiently available to groups reliant upon the Act for their health care needs.

American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to experience dramatic health disparities and high mortality rates compared to the rest of the American population. The mortality rate from diabetes for American Indians and Alaska Natives is 420 percent higher than that for the general population; from accidents, 280 percent; from suicide, 190 percent; and from alcoholism, 770 percent higher. These communities face serious public health issues that should be addressed with the best modern methods and techniques tailored to their needs.

We urge the Senate not to delay final action on S. 1200. It is important that the Senate pass the bill promptly to allow sufficient time for final passage of this important legislation before the end of the session.

Sincerely,



Denise A. Cardman  
Acting Director