August 3, 2020

Ms. Joanne Osborne
Office of Rural, Insular, and Native Achievement Programs
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., S.W
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Ms. Osborne,

I write to urge the Department of Education (ED) to reverse its decision to delay the Native Hawaiian Education Program (NHEP) grant award announcement for fiscal year 2020. While we understand the difficulties facing ED in light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, delaying the award announcement until the end of September creates an immense burden for current and upcoming NHEP grantees.

The 2020-2021 Hawaii school year begins on August 17, 2020. Delaying the grant notifications until after the start the school year creates a myriad of unexpected problems for NHEP grantees. Without funding certainty, grantees cannot efficiently hire, train, and prepare staff for programming. Conversely, grant applicants may need to transition or terminate current staff, should their programs not be awarded new grants. Grantees also cannot give the participating families adequate warning of program closures. Additionally, the delay constrains their ability to secure facility space from the Hawaii Department of Education for their programs.

The NHEP grantees have worked tremendously hard to create meaningful relationships and trust with the communities they serve. During this pandemic, these programs have been invaluable for families, many of which would be hard pressed to find an alternative option for their children. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted many education programs in Hawaii and across the country.

The NHEP grantees have demonstrated a deep commitment to our community by providing distance learning and support for struggling families. A timely release of the award notifications would allow these programs the stability necessary to continue to provide essential early education programs. I strongly urge ED to release the grant award notifications as soon as possible, but no later than August 14.

Thank you for your consideration. Please provide a written response by August 10.

Sincerely,

Brian Schatz
U.S. SENATOR