June 17, 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., Rm 3E306  
Washington, D.C. 20202-6200

Dear Ms. Osborne:

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic persists in communities across Hawaii, I write to urge the Department of Education to provide flexibility for the current Native Hawaiian Education Program (NHEP) grantees to continue to provide quality education services for students. In addition, the department should provide technical assistance for grantees during the upcoming fiscal year (FY) 2020 award cycle.

Currently, there are 37 grantees from fiscal year (FY) 2017 and FY 2018, 25 of which are in the last year of their 3-year grant award. NHEP grantees will need additional flexibility in using awarded funds as they adjust and respond quickly to school closures, programming changes in cost-per-learner, program staffing, and overall budget impacts. Grantees will also need extensions for both timeline and reporting requirements under their NHEP grant.

A large majority of NHEP grantees, 72 percent, of the third-year grantees represent community-based nonprofit organizations that provide services to homeless and foster youth outreach, meal distribution, telehealth, and financial assistance services in additional to educational programming. Over $20 million in grant funds have already been invested in these crucial programs, and many communities in Hawaii rely on these services during the pandemic.

Additionally, your department is in its final stages of the FY20 award cycle for the NHEP. Since the application deadline in late February, the ways in which organizations can provide educational and other programs have drastically shifted as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. FY20 grantees will need assistance in making changes to their program, goals, and outcomes. I encourage the department to engage in meaningful communication with current and upcoming grantees and provide additional technical assistance as they navigate through this public health crisis. NHEP grantees are fast, nimble, and have been a lifeline for the Native Hawaiian community during this unprecedented time.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your written response.

Sincerely,

Brian Schatz  
U.S. SENATOR