

MA Lawmakers urge Trump to fully fund COVID-19 response for Massachusetts Tribal Nations

United States Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Edward J. Markey (D-MA), along with Representatives William Keating (D-MA-09), Stephen F. Lynch (D-MA-08), Katherine Clark (D-MA-05), Lori Trahan (D-MA-03), Joseph P. Kennedy III (D-MA-04), James P. McGovern (D-MA-02), Richard E. Neal (D-MA-01), Seth Moulton (D-MA-06), and Ayanna Pressley (D-MA-07) sent a letter to President Trump requesting that he direct the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to waive the traditional cost-share requirements for all COVID-19-related assistance for the Commonwealth's two federally recognized tribal nations, the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) and the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe.

The lawmakers' letter comes after President Trump declared COVID-19-related emergencies for both tribal nations and follows a similar request for the Commonwealth made by the Massachusetts lawmakers last week.

"The response to the pandemic is unlike anything the Commonwealth or our nation has experienced in modern times, and the need for additional resources to combat this crisis grows with each passing day," the lawmakers wrote. "These needs are also felt acutely by the two federally recognized tribal nations in Massachusetts, which are being stretched extremely thin in order to provide crucial services to their citizens."

In early April, leaders from both tribal nations wrote to President Trump to request waivers from any cost share and to

request that FEMA increase its federal cost share from 75% to 100%, citing the financial hardship caused by the pandemic. Unlike states, the two tribal nations do not have a tax base to help cover the cost of services to their citizens and as a result, they have not been able to implement fully all the emergency measures they would have been able to take if they did not bear a significant share of the cost. In addition, the federal government's trust and treaty obligations require that tribal nations not be left to suffer severe hardship from an emergency.

"The federal government ought to provide COVID-19-related assistance while allowing for the tribal nations to endure as little hardship as possible," the lawmakers continued. "Granting the requests of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) and the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, and waiving the traditional cost share requirements for all COVID-19-related assistance to them, will better empower them to address this pandemic."

2020.04.22 Letter to President re. FEMA cost share for Massachusetts tribes

Senator Warren has been very active in working to ensure Indian Country has the resources it needs and is owed to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. She introduced the Tribal Medical Supplies Stockpile Access Act (S. 3514), legislation that would guarantee that the Indian Health Service, tribal health authorities, and urban Indian organizations have access to the Strategic National Stockpile, a federal repository of drugs and medical supplies that can be tapped if a public health emergency could exhaust local supplies. Senator Warren cosponsored Senator Udall's CDC Tribal Public Health Security and Preparedness Act (S. 3486), which would enable tribal nations and tribal organizations to apply directly to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for Public Health Emergency Preparedness program funds. She joined Senator Udall's letter to Vice President Mike Pence, head of the White

House Task Force on Coronavirus, urging him to engage meaningfully with tribal leaders and Native communities. Senator Warren also joined colleagues in urging President Trump to ensure that COVID-19 relief is implemented in a way that upholds the federal trust and treaty responsibilities, respects tribal sovereignty, and provides for meaningful government-to-government consultation with tribal nations.