



DCUC
DEFENSE CREDIT UNION COUNCIL

1627 Eye St, NW
Suite 935
Washington, DC 20006

202.734.5007
www.d cuc.org

Jason Stverak
Chief Advocacy Officer

February 11, 2025

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Indian Affairs Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Ranking Member
Indian Affairs Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Subject: The Need for Increased Access to Credit Unions and Financial Services in Native Communities

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Schatz,

On behalf of the Defense Credit Union Council (DCUC) and our member credit unions, I appreciate the opportunity to submit this letter for the record regarding the Committee's oversight hearing on "Native Communities' Priorities for the 119th Congress." DCUC represents credit unions stateside and overseas serving military and veteran communities as well as their families, encompassing over 40 million members and having over \$525 billion in assets.

One of the most pressing issues facing Native American communities today is the lack of access to affordable financial services. Many Native American reservations and communities exist in banking deserts, where access to traditional financial institutions is either limited or nonexistent. This absence of mainstream financial services leaves Native Americans vulnerable to predatory lenders, check-cashing services, and other exploitative financial practices that trap families in cycles of debt and economic instability.

Credit unions provide a powerful solution to these challenges by offering safe, responsible, and community-driven financial services. Unlike for-profit banks, credit unions are not-for-profit, member-owned financial cooperatives that reinvest in their communities. This structure allows credit unions to provide lower interest rates on loans, higher returns on savings, and financial education programs that help individuals and families build financial security.

For Native communities, the benefits of establishing and expanding credit union services are clear:

- **Ending Financial Exclusion:** Credit unions can provide low-cost checking and savings accounts, small business loans, home mortgages, and emergency credit options—critical services that are often unavailable in these areas.
- **Fighting Predatory Practices:** Without access to credit unions, many Native Americans must turn to payday lenders and other high-cost financial services that charge exorbitant fees and interest rates, deepening financial hardship.

Serving Those Who Serve Our Country

- **Encouraging Community Investment:** Credit unions reinvest in their communities, supporting small business growth, homeownership, and economic development.

- **Promoting Financial Education:** Many credit unions offer financial literacy programs that help individuals make informed decisions, build credit, and achieve financial stability.

However, despite the clear need and benefits, regulatory barriers and financial constraints often make it difficult to establish and expand credit union services in Native American communities. DCUC urges Congress to consider policies that will:

1. **Encourage and Support the Establishment of Credit Unions on Reservations** – Provide incentives and regulatory flexibility for credit unions seeking to serve Native communities.

2. **Expand Access to Capital for Native-Owned Credit Unions** – Increase funding and grant opportunities to help credit unions establish branches and digital banking services in underserved areas.

3. **Strengthen Consumer Protections Against Predatory Lenders** – Ensure that Native Americans are not disproportionately targeted by high-cost lending practices.

4. **Enhance Financial Readiness Programs** – Support initiatives that promote financial education and literacy tailored to the unique needs of Native American communities.

As an organization dedicated to serving military and defense-affiliated communities, DCUC understands the unique financial challenges faced by underserved populations, including Native American service members and veterans. By expanding access to credit unions, we can provide Native communities with the tools and resources necessary to build financial independence, strengthen local economies, and break cycles of financial hardship.

We appreciate the Committee’s attention to this critical issue and stand ready to support efforts to increase financial access and economic opportunity for Native communities. Thank you for your leadership, and we look forward to working together to ensure financial security for all Native Americans.

Should you or your team have any questions or desire additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 202.557.8528 or by email at jstverak@dcuc.org.

Sincerely,



Jason Stverak
Chief Advocacy Officer
DCUC

CC: Senate Indian Affairs Committee Members