

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:  
ARMED SERVICES  
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
INTELLIGENCE  
JOINT ECONOMIC

June 18, 2020

Dr. Robert R. Redfield  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Director Redfield,

I write you today concerning reports that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has turned down tribal epidemiologists' requests for data showing how the coronavirus (COVID-19) is spreading around their communities. This is the same data that the CDC is making freely available to states. By not allowing Native communities access to this data, your agency is playing a role in widening the health disparities that are already running rampant in areas that are ill-equipped to contain the spread and the outcomes of this pandemic.

I have serious concerns about reports that federal officials have been denying a release of data from the nation's 12 tribal epidemiology centers over the last month, including the Albuquerque Area Southwest Tribal Epidemiology Center and the Navajo Epidemiology Center. As you know, these tribal epidemiology centers are vital in helping to advance health care in Native communities by investigating diseases and injuries of concern, providing data and reports to help health programs effectively manage programs, responding to public health emergencies, and coordinating these activities with other public health authorities.

The refusal to release this data is putting these communities at a higher risk for COVID-19. In order to properly and effectively contain the spread of COVID-19, data is needed so that public health officials have the opportunity to plan, implement and evaluate public health practices. Additionally, this data will help identify underlying conditions that make these communities more susceptible to this virus.

Over the course of this pandemic, we have seen the devastation caused by COVID-19 throughout the United States, and particularly within our Native communities. The federal government cannot allow these communities to keep suffering; it has a trust responsibility to ensure that Native American populations have access to the resources needed to keep their communities safe, especially during a global pandemic. I urge you to work with tribal epidemiologists around the country and to immediately share the data they are requesting so that they have the same chance as states to fight against COVID-19.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Martin Heinrich', with a stylized, cursive script.

MARTIN HEINRICH  
United States Senator