



# OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

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March 2, 2021

New Mexico Senate  
Finance Committee  
490 Old Santa Fe Trail  
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Committee Members,

As Governor of the Pueblo of Acoma, and on behalf of my students and community, I write to express support for the New Mexico Higher Education Department's (NMHED) FY22 budget recommendation and S.B. 135, the New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship Act. This legislation will support Native American students, including recent high school graduates and working adults, in their pursuit of a college degree.

S.B. 135 permanently creates the Opportunity Scholarship fund in statute so that students benefit for years to come, and further, expands this crucial financial aid program designed to help low-income, first-generation, and non-traditional students who may not qualify for other scholarships. The legislation also provides \$46 million to cover tuition and fees for New Mexican students pursuing two-year and four-year degrees at Tribal and public colleges, reduces the credit hour requirement for returning adult learners from 12 credit hours to six, and accommodates part-time students. This updated recommendation would support an estimated 50,000 students and thousands of Native American students across New Mexico.

This credit hour reduction is critical to increasing access for students who in the past, were forced to decide between higher education and their personal circumstances and responsibilities. With credit hour reduction, that decision has been made for them. It is this access that is beneficial for our Native American students, whether they are continuing their education from high school, or returning as an adult learner.

The Opportunity Scholarship is also structured in a way that maximizes the benefit of all financial aid for the students who need it most. Low-income students who qualify for need-based aid such as Pell grants, and students who qualify for other federal aid can extend the impact of this money because the Opportunity Scholarship is applied to tuition and fees up to 100% of the total cost. This means that any federal financial aid received can be applied to expenses above and beyond tuition and fees, such as transportation, childcare, housing, and materials, which can be obstacles to college affordability.

We applaud Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham for her leadership and forward-thinking decision to invest in New Mexico's Tribal students and communities and look forward to opening more doors for our future generations to succeed.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to New Mexico students. We appreciate your time and consideration of this important matter impacting Tribal students, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

**PUEBLO OF ACOMA**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B. Vallo", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brian D. Vallo  
Governor