

Lawsuit Filed on Behalf of American Indians Living in the Cities

The National Urban Indian Coalition spearheaded a federal lawsuit filed on April 6, 2006 in the U.S. District Court Eastern District of Michigan, Southern Division. Plaintiffs in the case are two Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Tonya Hammitte and Joseph Stewart, one White Earth tribal member, David Stone, as well as American Indian Services of Lincoln Park, Michigan.

The suit was filed by urban Indians who are not getting the necessary and urgent medical care which they are entitled to. The University of Michigan's Clinical Law Program is representing urban Indians in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit which was filed is expected to have impact throughout the United States because urban Indians receive only 1% of the Indian Health Service budget, yet over 65% of American Indians live in the cities. American Indians, regardless of where they live receive the lowest level of health care in the country, even federal prisoners receive more health care funding.

These inequities exist in the face of the government's legal and moral obligation to provide health care to American Indians. American Indians gave up 95% of the land which is now the United States, in return they were to be provided with health care in perpetuity-forever! It has failed to materialize either on or off the reservation. The situation in the cities is bleak. The Bush Administration is attempting to eliminate all funding for 34 urban Indian health centers, making the situation even worse and making the lawsuit even more important.

Parties to this lawsuit are hoping in the end, to increase funding for health care in the cities, not to take any funding that now goes to the reservations for health care.

The U.S. Government itself acknowledges its responsibility to provide health care to American Indians, both on and off the reservations. A piece of legislation called the Snyder Act, passed by Congress requires that health care be provided to all American Indians. The trust relationship extends to all tribal members, not just those living on trust land.

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