

S. 254 – Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act

Named after a Tewa teacher and storyteller known for her dedication to revitalizing her people's language, Esther Martinez Native American language grants provides opportunities for tribal communities to assess, plan, develop, and implement projects that ensure the survival and continuing vitality of Native languages. This legislation aims to extend and update these grant programs so more Native communities can receive resources to revitalize and maintain their mother tongues.

Why Should We Fund Native Language Programs?

Native languages are endangered. Experts estimate that all of the approximately 148 Native languages that are still spoken are at risk of extinction within the next 50 to 100 years. The loss of these languages would deal a significant blow to our shared American and global heritage, but tribal communities are fighting to reverse this devastating trend. Congress can support these efforts by providing access to resources through programs like the Esther Martinez grant programs.

Native languages encourage community resilience. Native language programs reaffirm that Indigenous languages are *valuable* and *valid* tools for engaging with the world. This reaffirmation increases the self-esteem and self-efficacy of Native community members while also reducing the negative impact of the stereotype threats and toxic stress that many face in academic and professional environments. In addition, language programs bring together tribal members from multiple generations that allow participants to form bonds with their tribal community and cultural mentors. When at-risk youth have at least one role-model, research has shown that they are more likely to stay out of trouble and become productive members of their communities.

Bill Basics

Reauthorizes through FY2022 both Esther Martinez grant programs administered by the Administration for Native Americans at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) – the Native American Languages Preservation and Maintenance (P&M) grant program and the Esther Martinez Initiative (EMI) grant program.

Decreases the required minimum number of enrollees in Native American language nests funded by the grant program from 10 to 5 enrollees, and in the Native American language survival schools from 15 to 10 enrollees.

Increases the maximum possible duration of all Esther Martinez grants from three years to five.