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

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Honorable Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

As the Director of Education for the Pueblo de San Ildefonso, I am writing you to express the Pueblo's strong support for Senate Bill 140, the Opportunity Scholarship Act. This legislation will support Native American students in accessing higher education and seeking the career pathways that will provide family-sustaining incomes and strengthen tribal workforces and communities.

Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham's executive budget recommends \$85.5 million for a comprehensive free college package, a figure that represents only one percent of the state budget. This crucial financial aid program will benefit not only recent high school graduates, but first-generation and non-traditional adult learners who may not be eligible for other scholarships. Currently, over 11,000 Native American students are enrolled in public higher education institutions and tribal colleges in New Mexico. The Opportunity Scholarship Act would simplify the financial aid process and support up to 35,000 students, and in turn, thousands of additional Native American students across the state, pursuing higher education.

The six-credit hour minimum will create greater access to state financial aid for students who are working and/or have family and cultural responsibilities, while also meeting the diverse needs of New Mexico students. This credit hour reduction will significantly increase access for students who previously had to choose between pursuing a post-secondary degree and attending to their personal circumstances and responsibilities. This access is critical for our Pueblo students, whether they are enrolling immediately after high school or returning as an adult learner. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to think of another single piece of legislation with a greater positive impact, as it represents a robust commitment to higher education and a critical investment in the Pueblo's members and their individual and collective futures.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to New Mexico students. We appreciate your time and consideration of this important initiative impacting all Native American students, families, and tribal communities that will bring positive impacts for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Richard Juliani  
Director of Education  
Pueblo de San Ildefonso