

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4105

February 9, 2016

Rear Admiral Kevin Meeks  
Acting Area Director  
Great Plains Area Indian Health Service  
115 4th Avenue SE  
Room 309  
Aberdeen, SD 57401-4360

Dear Rear Admiral Meeks:

I write today regarding the state of health care services provided by the Indian Health Service (IHS) in the Great Plains Area. As you know, the quality of care delivered by the area is currently failing to meet the needs of South Dakota's tribal citizens.

Recently, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs held a hearing to examine the area's failings. These failings have jeopardized three hospital provider agreements and resulted in numerous EMTALA violations. Each one of these reports reveal that people's lives are at risk, which is unacceptable. Unfortunately, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) findings are nothing new. In 2010, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs released a report detailing many of the same issues the area faces today. Then, in 2011 and 2013, additional reports were released documenting corrective action plans, which we have now found were not executed. The Great Plains Area must do better.

I understand that you have experience in the Oklahoma City Area IHS and am hopeful that you will commit to increasing oversight and accountability within the Great Plains Area service units. In an effort to increase communication and transparency in the Great Plains Area, I would appreciate if you made yourself available to meet with me or my staff. Additionally, I would like to receive monthly updates on the progress to fill vacancies within the area, efforts to ensure IHS facilities remain compliant with these basic safety measures, and the assignments given to the four Commissioned Corp Officers deployed to the area. Most importantly, I would encourage you to make time to visit with each of the nine tribes in our state at your earliest possible convenience.

I look forward to working with you while you are serving the Great Plains Area to better the standard and quality of care delivered at IHS facilities.

Kindest regards,



JOHN THUNE  
United States Senator