



FEB 06 2020

Dear Tribal Leader and Urban Indian Organization Leader:

The United States (U.S.) Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (Corps) is a valuable component of the health care system of the Indian Health Service (IHS), Tribes, Tribal Organizations, and Urban Indian health programs. The professionalism, specialized training, and flexibility of the Corps also make it a vital component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), particularly as part of the Emergency Support Function (ESF) #8 role in supplementing local, state, Tribal, territorial, and insular area resources in response to a public health emergency or incident, including those with international implications.

The rapid spread of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is an emergent threat to the health and safety of our nation and the world, and requires an all-hands-on-deck approach to containing and minimizing its potential impact across the globe. As a result, the HHS Secretary and Assistant Secretary for Health (ASH) have begun to implement Corps participation in ESF #8 activities through outbreak expertise and guidance to health care professionals, conducting passenger screening at U.S. airports and borders, and providing logistical and technical support, as needed.

To ensure the availability of the greatest number of assets, the ASH has exercised his authority in Commissioned Corps Directive (CCD) 121.02 “Deployment and Readiness” (https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/ccis/documents/CCD_121.02.pdf) to deploy Corps officers assigned to HHS Operating and Staff Divisions without supervisory or agency approval. For Corps officers who are detailed to a non-HHS organization, the memorandum of agreement (MOA) currently in place will govern the terms under which Corps officers may deploy. The language in the MOA between the IHS and Tribes, Tribal Organizations, and Urban Indian programs, further reflects HHS authority to deploy Corps officers to meet the needs of the mission.

Additionally, in an effort to demonstrate the readiness of Corps officers to assist when called upon, the National Uniform Authority (NUA), the Surgeon General, has requested that, effective February 3, 2020, all Corps officers wear the Operational Dress Uniform (ODU) until further notice. Commissioned Corps Instruction (CCI) 412.01 “Uniforms and Appearance,” (<https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/ccis/documents/CC412.01.pdf>) states a Corps officer’s Local Uniform Authority (LUA) may prescribe a different uniform whenever situations warrant (e.g., the officer is scheduled to attend or present at a conference or high-level meeting). The LUA is the official who has the authority to prescribe the uniforms that may be worn within a given area.

The NUA has designated the Agency Chief Human Capital Officer and/or the Human Resource Directors as the LUA. Supervisors of Tribal or Urban Indian program representatives, may petition the LUA, through the IHS Division of Commissioned Personnel Support, for specific uniform requests during a temporary, fixed period of time, for a specific event or occasion. In the near future, we will outline a process through which these petitions may be made.

According to CCI 241.01, “Readiness and Duty Requirements” (https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/ccis/documents/CCI_241.01.pdf), “all officers shall maintain all required components of the Service Dress Blue and ODU uniforms. Each uniform must be serviceable and worn properly. Officers who do not have these required uniforms may be denied the opportunity to deploy, and may be subject to disciplinary action as appropriate.”

The IHS is committed to working closely with you, along with health program leadership, to assist as much as possible with solutions for backfilling Corps officers who are deployed. We are also a resource to you and a conduit to HHS and Commissioned Corps Headquarters for your questions, concerns, or challenges arising from these changes, which may also apply to future deployments.

If you have questions or concerns, please directly contact CAPT Angela Mtungwa, Director, Division of Commissioned Personnel Support, IHS, by e-mail at angela.mtungwa@ihs.gov, or by telephone at (301) 443-5440.

Thank you for your continued partnership, as we collectively support the HHS mission to minimize the impact of the 2019-nCoV and demonstrate the value of the Corps to our Nation’s public health.

Sincerely,

/Michael D. Weahkee/

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Principal Deputy Director

Enclosures: Commissioned Corps Directive 121.02, “Deployment and Readiness”
Commissioned Corps Instruction 412.01, “Uniforms and Appearance”
Commissioned Corps Instruction 241.01, “Readiness and Duty Requirements”