Opportunity Link
Uniting people. Linking resources. Fighting poverty.

STATE-TRIBAL RELATIONS IC
SEPTEMEBER 7, 2012
Exhibit 5

September 3, 2012

State-Tribal Relations Committee
P.O. Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing this letter in response to the inquiry made by Mr. Casey Barrs, Legislative Analyst, for the State -Tribal Relations Committee. Opportunity Link is a non-profit corporation committed to finding systemic ways to reduce poverty and help the communities of Northcentral Montana achieve independence, prosperity and a better way of life. The purpose of your meeting is to offer respectful and constructive discussion as it relates to State Tribal Relations Policy and the TANF-FES program. I do appreciate your invitation to address the committee in person and will comply with your request to provide comments. However, as I explained to Mr. Barrs, representatives from the Tribal communities are the individuals that should be consulted.

Opportunity Link serves an 11-county, three reservation region and has successfully implemented numerous asset and wealth creation programs, including workforce training and development. As an organization that continues to seek resources to enhance and expand our service delivery programs, I do not want my comments to attract negative impacts. I would hope that my comments regarding the TANF-FES program are considered for the purpose of ensuring that there is transparency and appropriateness in the delivery of the programs designated to serve tribal communities that are supported by the funds made available by the Department of Health and Human Services.

In my discussions with Mr. Barrs, I explained that Opportunity Link had prepared and submitted a proposal to the Department of Health & Human Service's Human and Community Services division in response to the Interim Family Economic Security Contractor RFP #1115096MG posted for a portion of SFY 2011 (January 1, 2011 - June 30, 2011). Our proposal was not selected by the Department and in subsequent inquires regarding the release of an RFP for fiscal years 2012 and 2013, I was informed that the existing contract had been extended. There were no provisions or references to extending a contract to provide the proposed services cited in the RFP. I am attaching a copy of RFP #1115096MG for your review and as documentation for the items I have referred to in this letter.

The RFP indicated that the service area encompasses all or a portion the Blackfeet, Rocky Boy and Fort Belknap Reservation areas including Glacier, Hill, Liberty, Phillips, Blaine and Chouteau Counties and outlying areas of Pondera, Teton and Toole

Counties. The responses provided by the Department to the questions raised during the Proposers' Conference call held on October 27, 2010, indicated that the term "outlying areas" refers to areas outside of, but in close proximity to, the reservation areas noted in the service area. The RFP mandated that community collaboration agreements be submitted with the proposal. Given that the service area specified the Blackfeet, Rocky Boy and Fort Belknap Indian Reservations, it should be expected that the agreements would be with the Tribal Government or designated Tribal Program.

It is my firm believe that contract extensions and/or modifications to the service delivery plans proposed in the original response to the RFP should not have been authorized by the DPHHS. Offering an additional extension for FY 2013 after several Tribes had voiced their concerns regarding the delivery of services can be viewed as a lack of willingness of the DPHHS staff to resolve disputes in a respectful manner. The issuance of a new RFP would have served as a notice that proposals were being sought by the department and any interested service provider would be required to secure community collaboration agreements, as called for in the attached RFP. Asking proposal reviewers to confirm that the agreements have been included in the proposal would also serve to ensure that the Tribes had been provided consultation in the development of the service delivery plans in meeting the Statutory Principles of State-Tribal Relations.

I do appreciate your invitation to address the committee in person and hope that my written comments will be viewed as helpful. Should you need any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Barbara Stiffarm, Executive Director

Cc: Mr. Casey Barrs, Legislative Analyst

Attachment