

Public Health Service
SPAAN, Mr. John

February 22, 1967

Dr. E. S. Rabeau
Assistant Surgeon General
Director, Division of Indian Health
Public Health Service
7915 Eastern Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Dear Dr. Rabeau:

Reference is made to your letter of January 18, 1967, in response to our recommendation of Mr. John Spaan for the Executive Officer position in the Public Health Service Indian Health Area Office at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. You will recall your explanation that the assignment had already been made to become effective April 1, 1967.

Indian leaders of our Congressional district are still very unhappy over the fact that a man is being transferred in from Alaska to fill this position. While they feel that Mr. Spaan, an Oklahoman, is well qualified for the position, they are insistent only that the new Executive Officer be someone, preferably an Oklahoman, who is acquainted with and sympathetic with the Oklahoma Indian and his problems. This doesn't seem to be an unreasonable request since such a large portion of the Indians served by the Oklahoma City Area Office are in Oklahoma.

My administrative assistant, Charles Ward, has relayed to your Tribal Affairs Officer, Mr. Robert Drew, our concern about the handicaps Mr. Ellis faces before he ever assumes the Oklahoma City assignment. Let me quote from a letter we have received from the Honorable Harry J. W. Belvin, Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation:

We have had our share of unhappy experiences with administrators who were shipped in here from far away places to try to mold the Oklahoma Indians to their concept.

Dr. E. S. Rabeau

Carl, they are just not in sympathy with the Indians... Indians are people, too! And they resent being cut to a pattern rather than having the pattern cut to them... We are appealing to you..."

Unfortunately, Mr. Ellis has become a symbol for all the disappointments, frustrations and unhappinesses experienced by our Indian people in their relations with the Oklahoma City Area office. Apparently, they have been sorely disappointed in the services of other professional people who have been sent into that office from other areas. They fear the same sort of performance from Mr. Ellis. Whether or not their fears are justified, he would be at a tremendous disadvantage from the start.

Dr. McBrayer, the present Indian Health Director, has announced that not only Mr. Ellis but other key personnel will be transferred into the Oklahoma City office from other areas.

I believe you have been sent a copy of the Resolution adopted by The Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes at its meeting in Hartshorne, Oklahoma, on January 11, 1967. In it, the Council pointed out that "background administrative experience with Alaska Indians and reservation Indians may be different and insufficient for our integrated Indian population in Oklahoma." It stressed the importance of having personnel in the Oklahoma City office who are "Familiar with Oklahoma, Oklahoma Indians and cooperative health agencies" and recommended "that the Executive Officer be preferably an Oklahoman, who is qualified for the position, who is sympathetic with the Oklahoma Indian and who has an understanding of the Indian problems."

In the light of the existing situation and the recommendation of the Council, I would strongly recommend that an effort be made to find in Public Health Service a well qualified person, preferably an Oklahoman, who is familiar and sympathetic with the Oklahoma Indian and his problems, for this Executive Officer position in the Oklahoma City office. If Mr. Overton James as President of the Inter-Tribal Council, could be consulted about the appointment, this would be tremendously helpful in that officer's future relations with the leaders of the people he is to serve.

Dr. E. S. Rabeau

We in no way mean any of this as a criticism of Mr. Ellis. We simply feel that he may be being placed in an impossible position. In order that the program you and we desire to be carried out, we feel a compromise in this matter would be in order.

Sincerely,

CARL ALBERT, M. C.
Third District, Oklahoma

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