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Interior Assistant Secretary Discusses Health Care Coverage Options with Citizens from the Freely Associated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Palau Living in Hawaii and U.S. Mainland

41,380 FAS Citizens Live in the 50 States; 19,830 in Guam and CNMI

WASHINGTON, D.C. (November 10, 2016) – Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Esther Kia’aina today held an outreach meeting with government representatives from the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the Republic of Palau, and community leaders from across the U.S. mainland to discuss health care coverage options and encourage citizens of the Freely Associated States (FAS) who live in the 50 U.S. States to enroll in health insurance plans available under the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

Today’s meeting which addressed current law under the ACA and additional health care coverage options including Medicare and community health centers was focused on FAS communities on the U.S. mainland where greater outreach and educational awareness is needed. The U.S. territories are exempt from providing ACA-qualified health plans and Hawaii’s state officials and community leaders have been actively engaged in their own outreach efforts.

Citizens of the FSM, RMI and Palau are legal nonimmigrants under the Compacts of Free Association with the United States, and are eligible to obtain insurance coverage under the ACA. Assistant Secretary Kia’aina encouraged these FAS citizens living in the U.S. to enroll for 2017 to ensure health care coverage and access to basic health services.

“While the Compacts of Free Association allow for Micronesians, Marshallese and Palauans entry into the United States as legal nonimmigrants for an indefinite period of time, FAS citizens were stripped of eligibility for federal public benefits under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, otherwise known as the Welfare Reform Act,” said Assistant Secretary Kia’aina. “However, the ACA does provide FAS citizens the

opportunity to obtain health care coverage in the absence of public health assistance programs. Health care access is critical to improving quality of life for these communities living in the United States.”

In a recent U.S. Census Bureau estimate of 2010-2014 data, there are approximately 41,380 citizens from the FSM, RMI and Palau living in the 50 states, a number which does not include U.S. citizens from the FAS. The five states with the highest number of FAS citizens are Hawaii (17,205), Arkansas (3,625), Washington (3,430), Oregon (2,580), and Texas (2,090). Another 19,830 FAS nationals are estimated to be living in the U.S. territories of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands according to a Census enumeration derived from the 2010 Census.

“The recent estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau for FAS citizens living in the 50 states will be helpful to policy makers in federal agencies and the U.S. Congress who may be considering proposals and cost estimates to reinstate federal public benefits to these communities to alleviate financial costs on impacted jurisdictions,” said Assistant Secretary Kia’aina.

The Secretary of the Interior is responsible for coordinating federal policy with respect to the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and administering and overseeing U.S. federal assistance provided to the freely associated states of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau under the Compacts of Free Association. On behalf of the Secretary, the Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas executes these responsibilities through the Office of Insular Affairs whose mission is to foster economic opportunities, promote government efficiency, and improve the quality of life for the people of the insular areas.

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