

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF JULIE KITKA, PRESIDENT
ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES
TO THE ALASKA LEGISLATURE
HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
March 5, 2018

Re: In support of HCR 19, Urging Governor Bill Walker to issue an administrative order recognizing a linguistic emergency.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony.

The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) is the largest statewide Native organization in Alaska. Its membership includes 186 federally recognized tribes, 177 village corporations, 12 regional corporations, and 12 regional nonprofit and tribal consortiums that contract and compact to run federal and state programs. Our mission is to enhance the cultural, economic and political voice of the entire Alaska Native community on a wide array issues.

AFN strongly supports House Concurrent Resolution No. 19, urging Governor Bill Walker to issue an administrative order recognizing a linguistic emergency.

Alaska is home to 20 officially recognized Alaska Native languages, Inupiaq, Siberian Yupik, Central Alaskan Yup'ik, Alutiiq, Unangax̂ Dena'ina, Deg Xinag, Holikachuk, Koyukon, Upper Kuskokwim, Gwich'in, Tanana, Upper Tanana, Tanacross, Hän, Ahtna, Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian. HB 216/SLA 2014, signed into law by Governor Sean Parnell, added the 20 Alaska Native languages to the official languages of the state.

Alaska Native languages embody our cultures, worldview, and the knowledge of our ancestors. Alaska Native languages exemplify the richness of our land and define our group orientation and kinship, personify our tangible and intangible relationship to our land, wildlife and universe. The wisdom of a people is embodied in their language, as it has been said: language carries the wisdom of Elders from one generation to the next. Solutions to the problems facing Native communities can be found within the culture and the language upon which it is based.

The state is in critical danger of losing those languages and, according to the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council – the creation of which was also signed into law by Governor Parnell in 2014 -- the state may lose the last fluent speakers of all 20 Alaska Native languages by the end of the 21st century.

AFN urges Governor Walker to issue an administrative order recognizing a linguistic emergency.

Attachments:
AFN Resolution 14-44