

LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

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ALASKA LEGISLATION REGARDING THE PRESERVATION OF ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGES

PREPARED FOR SENATOR DONALD OLSON

BY TIM SPENGLER, LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

You asked if legislation has been introduced in Alaska seeking to establish a board or advisory council to oversee programs designed to preserve Alaska Native languages. Briefly, we were unable to identify any such current or past legislative efforts in Alaska.¹ We did find, however, two examples of related legislation that may interest you, which we discuss below.

In 1972 the Alaska Legislature enacted CH 175 SLA 1972, which established the Alaska Native Language Center (ANLC) based at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF).² The mission of the ANLC is to serve as a center for research and documentation of the Native languages of Alaska. The Center publishes its research in story collections, dictionaries, and research papers. It also houses a large archival collection of items written in or about Alaska Native languages. Staff members provide materials for bilingual teachers and others who work with Native languages and provide consulting and training to teachers, school districts, and state agencies.

Professor Lawrence Kaplan, director of the ANLC, was unaware of any legislative attempts to form a board or council to oversee programs designed to preserve Alaska Native languages.³ He also polled his co-workers at the Center who were also unaware of such efforts. Additionally, we spoke with the founder and first director of the ANLC, Professor Michael Krauss.⁴ Professor Krauss, a Harvard-trained linguist who taught at UAF from 1960-2000, informs us that no such legislative efforts have been put forward to his

¹ In an attempt to identify proposed legislation we reviewed the Bill Action Status and Inquiry Systems (for legislative activity from 1993 to the present), the Alaska Final Status of Bills and Resolutions books (for information from 1977-1992), and the Legislative Reporting Service reports (for information from 1960-1976). Additionally, we completed a Newsbank search and spoke to Alaska Native language experts. Despite our efforts, it is possible that relevant proposals of legislation have eluded us.

² More information on the Alaska Native Language Center is available at <http://www.uaf.edu/anlc>.

³ Professor Kaplan can be reached at (907) 474-6582.

⁴ Professor Krauss can be reached at (907) 479-6340.

knowledge.⁵ He asserted that if such measures had been considered, he would almost certainly have been aware of them.

Additionally, Senate Bill 103, which addressed Native languages in schools, was passed into law in 2000 (CH 29 SLA 2000, codified as AS 14.30.420).⁶ This measure mandates that school districts in which a majority of students are Alaska Natives shall establish a local Native language curriculum advisory board. If an advisory board recommends the establishment of a Native language curriculum, the school board in that district may initiate and conduct such a curriculum.

We hope you find this information to be useful. Please let us know if you have questions or need additional information.

⁵ The idea of a board or advisory council to oversee programs to preserve Alaska Native languages intrigued the professor. He related that he would be very happy to consult with anyone considering such a measure.

⁶ The version of Senate Bill 103 that passed the legislature was House CS for Senate Bill 103 (HES).