

Alaska State Legislature

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Sponsor Statement
CS HB 254(STA)
Alaska Native Language & Advisory Council

Alaska Native Languages (ANL's) are threatened by extinction. The intent of HB 254 is to preserve and maintain these languages. Indigenous languages are the most critical components in preservation of cultural ideas and traditions and serve as the backbone of all cultural elements.

HB 254 establishes the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council to assess the state of ANL's and re-evaluate programs within the state and make recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature to provide for the cost-effective continuity of ANL's.

According to the Alaska Native Language Center's *Population and Speaker Statistics* published in 2007, only 22 percent of Alaska Natives statewide can speak their native language. More specifically, only 29 percent of the Eskimo Aleut population, less than two percent of the Tsimshian and Haida, and less than five percent of the Athabascan and Tlingit communities combined are fluent speakers. The Eyak language recently lost its last native fluent speaker. (Krauss, Michael E. 2007. Native languages of Alaska. In: *The Vanishing Voices of the Pacific Rim*).

The preservation and restoration of Alaska's important cultural heritage of Native Languages is one important component of our collective history. We are all richer for maintaining this vital knowledge.