

Annette Evans Smith Testimony in strong support of HB 254

Alaska State Legislature House State Affairs Committee – February 16, 2012

I. Introduction and Thank You

Representative Lynn and members of the committee, my name is Annette Evans Smith, and I serve as the President and CEO of the Alaska Native Heritage Center.

Quyana niicuniluqi. Nwiinga Picari owgua. Qinuyong ow ru gut. Ataam quiamci.

Thank you for listening to me. My Yup'ik name is Picari. Again, I thank you.

Dzaanh nezoonh. Nehoneļo se'ooze, dehoon Gissakk kk'e heļde Annette Evans Smith seznee. Enaa'e Carol Evans be'ooze. Eetaa'e Richard Evans be'ooze. Enaa'e bedeļnekkaa Annie Zimin yeļ Carvel Zimin heelanh. Eetaa'e bedeļnekkaa Kitty Evans yeļ Peter Evans gellea'. Dleļ Taneets huts'aanh ts'adaanslet dehoon Anchorage lesdo.

Good Day. My name is Nehoneļo in Koyukon Athabascan, while in English they call me Annette Evans Smith. My parents are Carol and Richard Evans. My maternal grandparents are Annie and Carvel Zimin, while my paternal grandparents were Kitty and Peter Evans. Rampart is the place I call home, while I live in Anchorage.

II. Indigenous language knowledge leads to strong cultural identity and higher self-esteem

- The DNA of our cultures lives within our languages; with loss of language, comes loss of vast amounts of traditional knowledge. Our languages make our state unique. They tell the story of our state.
- It is critical that we take proactive measures now to strengthen our languages while language speakers in each of the Alaska Native culture groups still exists and the interest and aspiration to revitalize our languages for future generations is strong.
- Compelling evidence exists that links indigenous children who have strong traditional cultural and linguistic backgrounds with academic success.
- Languages fill a vital role: strong cultural identity and knowledge leads to strong cultural identity, knowledge and self-esteem.
- Children taking language and culture classes benefit by gaining stronger identities and knowledge and appreciation of their heritage. The reverse is also true. AI/AN teenagers who are more conflicted about their culture are at greater risk of engaging in high risk activity like alcohol and drug problems and dropping out of school (Stiles 1997).
- The Alaska Native Heritage Center's nationally award winning after-school program and internship program have both reached their highest high school graduation rates ever, 83% and 86% respectively in 2010.
- At our core, we recognize that indigenous language learning promotes increased self-esteem and confidence for Alaska Natives, particularly youth, and a strong cultural identity and knowledge of self translates into a stronger person overall.

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III. Future Planning at the Alaska Native Heritage Center – Immersion Pilot Projects

- ANHC is working to develop programs on site at the Center to provide indigenous language learning opportunities in full immersion setting.
- Tribal groups that begin Native language instruction at an early age will be more effective than tribes that concentrate on teaching older students (Greymorning, 1997; 1999)
 - Several successful language nest immersion programs include Kōhangā Reo in New Zealand, ‘Aha Pūnana Leo in Hawaii, and Arapaho Immersion Grade School in Wyoming.

IV. Statewide linkages are urgently needed to connect language strengthening efforts

- Because government authorities have played such a powerful role in the decline of Native languages, it is reasonable to expect that they can play some role in restoring some of those languages.
- SB 130 / HB 254 will help provide the much-needed political infrastructure, as well as the resources both human and financial, to build and follow policies within and outside the state government, to promote sustainable Alaska Native languages efforts. This bill will help to unify our programs working to restore Alaska Native languages.
- Meaningful investment by the State of Alaska in the cultural strengthening of Alaska Native languages will not only contribute to a stronger Alaska Native society, but a stronger Alaska as a whole, and therefore warrants the highest legislative priority.

V. Again, thank you Representative Lynn and members of the House State Affairs Committee, for the opportunity to testify on behalf of HB 254.

I would also like to thank Representatives Allan Dick and Kathy Muñoz for sponsoring this bill.

I am available for questions.

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Citations:

Greymorning, Stephen. (1997). "Going Beyond Words: The Arapaho Immersion Program." In *Teaching Indigenous Languages* edited by Jon Reyhner (pp. 22-30). Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.

Greymorning, Stephen. (1999). "Running the Gauntlet of an Indigenous Language Program." In *Revitalizing Indigenous Languages*, edited by Jon Reyhner, Gina Cantoni, Robert N. St. Clair, and Evangeline Parsons Yazzie (pp.6-16). Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.

McIvor, Onowa. (2005). "The Contribution of Indigenous Heritage Language Immersion Programs to Healthy Early Childhood Development". In *Research Connections Canada, Supporting Children and Families*, edited by Judith Whitehead. Pp. 5-17. Ottawa: Canadian Child Care Federation.

Stiles, Dawn B. (1997). "Four Successful Indigenous Language Programs." In *Teaching Indigenous Languages* edited by Jon Reyhner (pp. 248-262). Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.

Additional Sources on Identity Language and Culture:

(All online at <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/books-of-the-year>)

Bissett, Hallie. "I am Alaska Native." Recent UAA graduate and current MBA student, Dena'ina Athabascan Hallie Bissett discusses her struggle to understand her indigenous identity. She not only comes to terms with her culture, but also realizes how central it is to her life.

Breinig, Jeane. "Alaska Native Writers, Alaska Native Identities." Jeane Breinig, Ph.D., Haida, is currently a UAA Associate Professor of English. In this essay, Breinig discusses how four Alaska Natives writers portray aspects of their contemporary identities, while still maintaining connections to their respective cultural traditions.

Breinig, Jeane. "Inside the Circle of a Story." This family story written by Jeane Breinig, Ph.D., Haida professor of English at UAA, discusses the role of Haida oral traditions, storytelling, and language revitalization in Southeast Alaska. It includes links to writing by her mother Julie Coburn.

Bruchac, Joseph W. III. "We are the In-betweens: An Interview with Mary TallMountain." Studies in American Indian Literatures, Series 2, Vol. 1, Num.1 (Summer 1989). Interview with nationally renowned Koyukun-Athabascan writer (who was adopted into a white family at the age of six) about her life and writings.

Burch, Ernest S., Jr. "From Skeptic to Believer: The Making of an Oral Historian." Ernie Burch, Jr. Ph.D., social anthropologist, specializes in the early historic social organization of the Inupiaq. In this essay, he argues for the validity of using Native oral histories to truly understand the historical record. He contends that oral histories are often ignored or misunderstood by academics, and argues for their inclusion in research projects.

Fast, Phyllis. "Alaska Native Language, Culture and Identity." Essay, 2008. Phyllis Fast, Ph.D., Athabascan, is UAA Associate Professor of Anthropology. She is also an author and an artist. In this essay, Fast discusses the value of pre-colonial religious traditions and language, as well as the post-colonial impact of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 and the ANCSA 1991 Amendments of 1988.

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Hensley, Willie. “Speech at Bilingual Conference.” Anchorage, 1981. William Hensley, Inupiaq, architect of ANCSA, reflects on key issues regarding the relationship between schooling, education and the future of Alaska Native cultures in a 1981 speech to the annual Bilingual/ MultiEducation Conference.

Jacobson, Steven A. “Central Yup’ik and the Schools.” This handbook was designed to assist school districts in providing effective educational services to students from the Yup’ik language group. This is one of three handbooks developed to increase school districts' and school personnel's understanding of selected Alaska Native language groups.

Maclean, Edna Ahgeak. “Why Don’t We Give Our Children to Our Native Languages?” Edna Maclean, Ph.D., Inupiaq, former president of Iliksavik College, provides an overview of the effects of education on Alaska Native languages, a discussion of the State of Alaska's approach to bilingual education, and suggestions for ways to revive and maintain Alaska Native languages.

Oquilluk, William. “People of Kauwerak: Legends of the Northern Eskimo.” William Oquilluk, Inupiaq from Point Hope (1896-1972), wrote down these stories of his people when he was concerned they would be lost without written documentation. This excerpt from his book focuses on one of the disasters that befell the people.

TallMountain, Mary. “Indian Blood.” Poem by nationally renowned Koyukon Athabascan writer.

Thompson, Chad. Athabaskan Languages and the Schools: A Handbook for Teachers. Jane McGary, Ed. Alaska Native Language Center, 1984. Chad Thompson, Ph.D., linguist, describes the job of a linguist and provides an overview of Athabascan languages.

Williams, Brad. “A Bridge Between Two Worlds: the term half breed gets a new definition.” True North, Spring 1999. Brad Williams, reporter for True North, interviews several “mixed identity” Alaska Native citizens, including Jack Dalton, Tim Gilbert, and Priscilla Hensley, who describe their struggles to come to terms with who they are today.

Other Web sites of Interest Alaska Native Language Center: <http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/>

Internationally recognized, the ANLC was established in 1972 by state legislation as a center for documentation and cultivation of the state's 20 Native languages. Housed at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, ANLC publishes research in story collections, dictionaries, grammars, and research papers. ANLC also maintains an archival collection of more than 10,000 items.

Sealaska Heritage Institute. Online resources promoting language restoration of Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian languages.

<http://www.tlingitlanguage.org/>
<http://www.haidalanguage.org/>
<http://www.tsimshianlanguage.org/>

Yukon Koyukuk School District – See “Native Language” Tab
<http://www.yksd.com/>