

First Alaskans Institute



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Mission

Advance Alaska
Natives through
community engagement,
information and research,
collaboration, and
leadership development.

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February 15, 2012

Senator Donald Olson
State Capitol Room 508
Juneau AK 99501

Representative Alan Dick
State Capitol Room 104
Juneau AK 99801

Re: SB 130 & HB 254 Creating the Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council

Dear Senator Olson and Representative Dick,

On behalf of First Alaskans Institute, we extend a sincere thank you (**Unangam Tunuu: Qajaalakuŋ -- thank you**) (**Inupiat: qulaglsi apai - I thank you very much**) to the sponsors and co-sponsors of SB 130 and HB 254 for your deep insight and commitment in moving the important topic of Alaska Native languages forward in this state; *it is critically needed.*

First Alaskans Institute is a statewide Alaska Native non-profit organization focused on advancing Alaska Natives for the next 10,000 years. We work to empower the indigenous peoples of this land to ensure that we are involved in, shaping, and making the decisions that impact our lives.

Revitalizing our Alaska Native languages is an important part of the restoration of healthy and well communities in Alaska -- for all Alaskans. We ask all legislators to support this bill and vote in the affirmative to create the Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council. Some may ask why support Alaska Native languages when there are so many different languages from across the world spoken in Alaska? The answer is simple. All other world languages have a home, countries which speak them, nurture them, and grow their complexity and nuance over time but the only home the indigenous languages of Alaska have is right here.

Our languages contribute to the uniqueness of Alaska and the rich human diversity of this planet. Given an opportunity to blossom, they nourish and enrich lives, empower voices, grow cultural continuity, and strengthen identity. People who are strong in who they are and knowledgeable about their cultures are prepared for and work hard for individual and collective success.

Most importantly, languages contain knowledge not available anywhere else in the world, especially in relationship to the land it has grown and developed on. If we, as Alaskans, are to steward Alaska and her resources into the future for her common good and for the benefit of all Alaskans, then the languages of Alaska Native peoples is crucial to this endeavor.

In reading through the most current version of the bills, we want to emphasize and acknowledge the importance of this legislation's purpose of working to preserve and revitalize our endangered Alaska Native languages and to advise the Governor and the Legislature on how to do so. In order for this Council to be successful it will need resources to implement initial and on-going activities. We also strongly support and request the Governor and the appropriate appropriations committees to accordingly allocate the needed state resources.

Again, it is with excitement over the promise contained in this bill – that our languages are vital to our success and that of our children, and to the health of Alaska overall, that we request full Legislative support of SB 130 and HB 254.

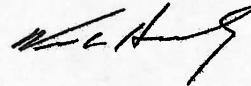
My Board Chair or I would be happy to provide testimony in support of this vital legislation if the need arises so please do not hesitate to contact me.

Ilsilix,



Denise R. Morris (Unangan)
President/CEO

Quyanaq,



Willie "Iggiagruk" Hensley (Inupiaq)
Chair of the Board of Trustees