



Sponsor Statement

House Joint Resolution 3 Congress: Alaska Native Tribal Sovereignty

House Joint Resolution 3 declares the Legislature's support for measures Congress can take to address persistent, devastating social strife in our rural communities. It advocates establishing greater jurisdiction and accountability for local tribal authorities, in particular tribal courts.

In matters of tribal sovereignty and the delivery of justice at the local level, ambiguities in federal law have deprived Alaska tribes of jurisdictional tools to make their communities safer and healthier. Meanwhile, rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, domestic violence, and sexual assault that are among the highest in the U.S. have continued to shatter communities.

In tandem with House Concurrent Resolution 1—Tribal Sovereignty Proclamation—HJR 3 demonstrates the state's willingness to collaborate with Alaska Native tribes on ways to increase their power to alleviate crime, social ills, and community distress.

Over the past 25 years, a multitude of state, federal, and joint commissions were created to address these issues. Time and again, they reached similar conclusions and recommendations, and time and again their recommendations were not implemented to the extent necessary to make significant impact.

HJR 3 endorses strengthening the authority, responsibility, and capacity of local tribal governments to administer public safety and justice in their communities. Experts agree that greater control, better defined jurisdiction, and increased accountability at the local level will lead to swifter response to violence and criminal activity, increased crime prevention, and increased rehabilitative, rather than punitive, sentencing models.

Seating more authority with Alaska tribes also has the potential to increase federal funding to augment tribal institutional capacities for the local delivery of justice, which in time will help lessen the burden on state law enforcement, court system, and corrections system resources.

For too many decades state policy has had too small an impact on the criminal and social problems in our rural communities. It is time to change our approach and support empowering Alaska Native tribes to make a difference.