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January 28, 2016

To: House State Affairs Committee

In support of House Bill 275 "Indigenous Peoples Day"

The recognition of Indigenous Peoples Day is meaningful to me – not so much because I am a professor of Alaska Native Studies, or that I am Tlingit Indian – but because it honors our legacy and our existence. Transitions in the state since statehood continued to make for a trying time for Alaska Native peoples. Growing up during this period meant perhaps removal from one's family and placement in other homes or schools, being escorted out of establishments, unwarranted arrests, or many other occurrences that would diminish one's cultural, familial, and even spiritual existence as an indigenous human being. This bill has the potential to bring some sense of peace to a tragic history.

Recognition of a human beings' existence goes a long way. That is what this bill is offering. That recognition that we exist; that we matter. That we contribute to the good of state. That we are here. That our cultures are valuable and worthy. It adds another layer of dignity.

The bill implies there is value in Native people and culture. It is important to say this, because Alaska Native people have been dehumanized, as evidenced through the high numbers of violence against Native women, and the levels of the incarcerated, the deaths, and disenfranchised. Such violence and disregard can only occur, as history has repeatedly demonstrated, when one is dehumanized; reduced to a disposable character. Therefore, for the societal affect alone, this bill is meaningful. It is one spoke in the wheel of change that is so desperately needed. It encourages a way of thinking – the value of each human being.

Please pass this bill.

Gunalchéesh,
Diane E Benson (L'xeis')