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March 23, 2016

The Honorable Senator Coghill and Representative Millett  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, AK

via : e-mail to: [jordan.shilling@akleg.gov](mailto:jordan.shilling@akleg.gov), [grace.abbott@akleg.gov](mailto:grace.abbott@akleg.gov), and [kalyssa.maile@akleg.gov](mailto:kalyssa.maile@akleg.gov)

RE: Support for SB91 and HB205 and Opposing the Amendment Concerning Public Assistance

Dear Senator Coghill and Representative Millett:

As President/CEO of Kawerak, Inc., the regional non-profit tribal consortium in the Bering Strait Region of Alaska, and also as co-chair of AFN's Council for Advancement of Alaska Natives, I write to you today in support of SB91 and HB205, which would provide criminal justice reform in Alaska. Please do not allow these bills to be "watered down."

In the Bering Strait Region of Alaska, the majority of those incarcerated for crimes are low-income Alaska Natives. The majority of those who have committed crimes have done so under the influence of alcohol and/or other substances. The bills as you have introduced them, will provide an avenue to break the vicious cycle of social ills that contributes to the high rates of incarceration. Your bills will help restore healthy communities, improve public safety, save the state money, and expand treatment and supportive services to reduce recidivism.

However, denying public assistance to one class of criminals, as suggested by Senator Bill Stoltze's amendment to SB91 to ban convicted drug offenders from receiving food stamps if they test positive for drugs, is contrary to the overall intent to provide people the assistance they need to become productive, law-abiding citizens. Food, water, and shelter are the basic necessities for life. Punishing people who are addicted to drugs by denying them access to food is both morally and logically incomprehensible. People addicted to drugs should be provided treatment options, not denied food.

Other states that had implemented a similar provision have already repealed the ban (18 states), and 26 other states have modified it. Please ensure the Alaska State Legislature does not allow this amendment to your bills.

Thank you for your sponsorship of SB91 and HB205; please do not allow any amendments that will contradict the overall intention of the actual bills.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melanie Bahnke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Melanie Bahnke, President  
Kawerak, Inc.

cc: Senator Donny Olson  
Representative Neal Foster