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February 28, 2017

Representative Chris Tuck
State Capitol Room 204
Juneau AK, 99801
Representative.Chris.Tuck@akleg.gov

Sent Via Electronic Mail

Re: Support for House Bill 1, An Act Relating to Absentee Voting, Voting and Voter Registration; Relating to Early Voting Locations and Which Persons May Vote Absentee Ballots; and Providing for an Effective Date.

Dear Representative Tuck:

On behalf of the ANCSA Regional Association (the Association), we write to express our support for House Bill 1, Electronic Registration and Voting. The ANCSA Regional Association represents the Chief Executive Officers of the twelve land-based regional Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs), as well as the President of the Alaska Federation of Natives. Our corporations are owned by over 121,000 Alaska Native people and were formed under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, 43 U.S.C. § 1601, et. seq. (ANCSA). Our mission is to promote and foster the continued growth and economic strength of the Alaska Native Regional Corporations on behalf of our shareholders. When measured against the top 49 Alaska-owned companies, ANCs account for 75 percent of the revenue earned, 69 percent of Alaskan jobs, and 86 percent of the global employment. Making up 20 of the top 49 Alaska-owned companies, Alaska Native Corporations have become an economic engine of Alaska.

The Association respectfully writes in support of House Bill 1. As many of you know and appreciate, the right to vote is a cornerstone of our democracy. ANCSA Regional Association is supportive of H.B. 1 because we believe it includes important changes that will clarify the voting process, improve access to voting, and increase voter participation.

During the 2014 primary and general election, representatives from ANCSA Regional Association, Get Out The Native Vote and the Alaska Federation of Natives assisted the Division of Elections in creating absentee in-person voting sites in villages that either did not have one or needed to reestablish themselves officially with the state. In assisting with this process, it was clear there was a widespread confusion among the public regarding the terminology for early voting and absentee-in person voting. We believe H.B. 1 helps alleviate this confusion by uniformly calling the voting stations "early" voting stations.

The ANCSA Regional Association supports H.B.1 because it will enhance voter registration process by allowing for electronic signatures. Currently, applicants are required to print and sign an application, then scan or fax the signed application to the Division of Elections. Another option is for the applicant to complete a form in person at one of the five Alaska Division of Elections regional offices. Many residents in rural Alaska may lack access to a printer, scanner or a fax machine. Furthermore, rural residents may lack the means to travel to an elections office due to the high cost of airfare. We believe allowing electronic signatures will make the registration process quicker and easier.

The ANCSA Regional Association supports H.B.1 because it will enhance voter participation and access through the creation of a permanent absentee voting option. Voting by mail removes the pressure to rush through the process of picking candidates and understanding complex ballot initiatives. By voting at home, individuals have the opportunity to research the issues, vote at their convenience, and have available language assistance. Many residents in rural Alaska are often busy fishing and hunting, especially in the August primary, so by eliminating the additional step of applying for an absentee ballot each year will be an important enhancement to our voting system.

The ANCSA Regional Association believes every Alaskan resident who seeks to participate in the political process should be afforded an equal opportunity to cast a vote, and House Bill 1 helps make voting more equitable. The ANCSA Regional Association is supportive of H.B. 1.

Sincerely,
ANCSA REGIONAL ASSOCIATION

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim Reitmeier". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kim Reitmeier
Executive Director

cc: ANCSA Regional Association Board of Directors