

February 28, 2017

To: House State Affairs Committee members
Re: HB 127 and HB 118

Chairman Kreiss-Tomkins, Vice Chairwoman LeDoux and members of the State Affairs Committee,

Tanana Chiefs Conference is an Alaska Native non-profit corporation, charged with advancing Tribal self-determination and enhancing regional Native unity. We are the traditional tribal consortium of 37 federally recognized tribes within 42 interior Alaskan communities. Our work is involved in the areas of health services, cultural and natural resources, and tribal development. TCC works closely with its membership to carry out its mission.

Fourteen months ago, Tanana Chiefs Conference celebrated the release from incarceration of the four men known as the Fairbanks Four, Marvin Roberts, George Frese, Eugene Vent and Kevin Pease. These men had maintained their innocence for 19 years and were partially vindicated after a five week trial when the state of Alaska traded the keys to their jail cells for the release of any civil liability in the prosecution and investigation of their cases. These four men can not seek compensation through the court processes available to most people. The State also did not provide these boys with any type of reparation to transition back into daily life; literally they are left with the shirts on their backs. Despite their proven innocence, the difficulty of reentering society is profound for the wrongfully convicted; the failure to compensate them adds insult to injury. Society has an obligation to promptly provide compassionate assistance to the wrongfully convicted

The process to guarantee true justice will be a long one. To ensure that no more Alaska Native men and women are falsely imprisoned, wrongfully convicted or victimized by the Alaska criminal justice system, many things must be examined and rehabilitated. It will involve oversight and training of law enforcement on false confessions, custodial interrogations and preservation of evidence best practices. It must include examination of charging and sentencing disparity as it applies to both rural and urban Alaska Natives and all Alaskans. Prosecutorial misconduct and the mechanisms for accountability of State officials need to be codified with real and meaningful sanctions available. Eyewitness identification reform, access to post-conviction DNA testing, these reforms and subsequent change in law is often based on the work of Criminal Justice Reform Commissions similar to our own. Tanana Chiefs Conference will be seeking all of the reforms above, this year and every year until lasting change is achieved. We ask for your support in our endeavors.

SUBREGIONS:**Upper Kuskokwim***McGrath
Medfra
Nikolai
Takotna***Lower Yukon***Anvik
Grayling
Holy Cross
Shageluk***Upper Tanana***Dot Lake
Eagle
Healy Lake
Northway
Tanacross
Tetlin
Tok***Yukon Flats***Arctic Village
Beaver
Birch Creek
Canyon Village
Chalkyitsik
Circle
Fort Yukon
Venetie***Yukon Koyukuk***Galena
Huslia
Kaltag
Koyukuk
Nulato
Ruby***Yukon Tanana***Alatna
Allakaket
Evansville
Fairbanks
Hughes
Lake Minchumina
Manley Hot
Springs
Minto
Nenana
Rampart
Stevens Village
Tanana*

House Bill 127 and 118 are important first steps in ensuring the integrity of our criminal justice system. Currently, the federal government, the District of Columbia and 30 states have compensation statutes. Twenty states do not. Alaska is one of those twenty. This is not an honored distinction. Please support this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Tanana Chiefs Conference



Victor Joseph,
President/Chief