



March 7, 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,

Fairbanks Native Association was interior Alaska's first Alaska Native civil rights organization, and has advocated for the traditional rights of Alaska Native people ever since. After being incorporated in 1967 as a nonprofit under the laws of the State of Alaska, the Fairbanks Native Association worked to adapt and create innovative programs to meet changing community needs. Most programs have been expanded to provide all Fairbanks residents with early childhood education, healing services, and prevention efforts. For 50 years, FNA organization has had a positive impact on residents of all ages in the greater Fairbanks area. FNA programs are helping countless people to find new jobs, maintain sobriety, celebrate culture, and receive an education.

Fourteen months ago, Fairbanks Native Association 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

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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. Fairbanks Native Association supports all of the reforms above. We ask for your support in our endeavors.

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,

Fairbanks Native Association

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Steve Ginnis".

Steve Ginnis
Executive Director