

From: Gavin Hudson
To: [House Community and Regional Affairs](#)
Subject: HCR 19 Testimony Thursday March 8, 2018, 8:00AM
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To: House Community & Regional Affairs Committee
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From: Gavin Hudson, Chairman of the Haayk Foundation, Metlakatla, Alaska

Honorable Members of the House Community & Regional Affairs Committee, and to all the members of the Alaskan Legislature, I am compelled to testify to you this morning because we need the elected leadership of Alaska to admit that we have A Linguistic Emergency on our hands. We are losing what might be the last generation of Tsimshian fluent speakers. Sm'algyax, the beautiful language of the Tsimshian people, is dying. In the entire world, there are less than 100 fluent speakers of our language. In Alaska, there are only six. Every living fluent speaker is over the age of 65, many in their 70's, 80's, and 90's. Many with poor health. I have heard that some Alaskan languages could be gone within 100 years. I am here to tell you, that our language, one of the official languages of the State of Alaska, could be gone in 20 years. That, ladies and gentlemen, is within my own lifetime, and within yours. We all could may very well be the witnesses of the death of our last fluent speaker. If and when that day comes, what will history say about you? Did you do everything you can do to stop it? Did you even admit there was a problem? Did you at least acknowledge the emergency? In our language, we have an ancient and positive expression, sa'aaml waan, it means make good what you do and make your name good. Our names, the quality of them, is determined by our actions. Did we behave with integrity and compassion? Did we answer the call to serve? Do we hold others up when they need our support?

No one can save a language on their own. But languages can be saved, if we do it together. Whether you are indigenous or not, we are all in the same canoe, and we have to pull together. We need you, all of you, to help us. I am asking for your support in the effort to save the Tsimshian language, I am asking you to vote yes in declaring a linguistic emergency. We have all sworn oaths to do what is best for our peoples. And I am telling you, having living and vibrant indigenous languages is what is best for our State. Learning our grandparents' language, and then passing it down to our grandchildren, is an act of overcoming colonialism and historical trauma. Bilingual children do better in math, science, reading, art and music. As Mr. Boxley and Dr. Alice Taff have both testified, when an indigenous language is healthy, rates of suicide and drug abuse drop significantly. So this is not just a matter of health, but literally of life and death. At a time of division and animosity, we can decide to move forward together toward the beautiful and noble goal of saving our mother tongues.

We Tsimshian have another ancient, positive expression, Wayi Wah! Wayi Wah means,
Let's go!

So I say to you today, Wayi Wah, because this is an emergency, and we have no time to waste.

Thank you for your time.