

Greetings Chair LeDoux,

I write in support of HB 24. I have previously submitted testimony to other Committees in support of HB 24, which will give school districts in Alaska the flexibility to certify quality, knowledgeable fluent Native language speakers so that they can teach in local immersion programs. Additionally, Native language advocates will be able to work with the state board of education to design this teacher certificate specifically suited for Native language revitalization and immersion programs.

My name is Leslie Harper. I am an enrolled member of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe in the State of Minnesota where I work as Government Relations Specialist for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Tribal Government. I write in strong support of HB 024 in my capacity as the President of the National Coalition of Native American Language Schools and Programs.

(NCNALSP). The National Coalition of Native American Language Schools and Programs seeks to educate and advocate for the use of Native languages as the medium of instruction in schools and programs. The Coalition represents existing programs in seventeen different states and offers assistance to groups seeking to start programs in these and other states and American territories. NCNALSP has member partners who represent several different Alaska Native language immersion initiatives across the state. The National Coalition is a non-partisan group of organizations, families, parents and allies that serves to bring together schools and programs taught through Native American languages under the provisions of the federal Native American Languages Act of 1990 (NALA, P.L. 101-477). The Coalition members include Bureau of Indian Education schools, standard public schools, charter schools, and private schools. The Coalition also includes the full range of education from preschool through to grade 12 and into tertiary education. All members provide education through a Native American language for one half or more of all education in targeted grades.

HB 024 is important to the NCNALSP because of the leadership role that Alaska Native languages play in assisting a parallel movement for Native American and Hawaiian Native languages. The language plan produced by your state under HB 024 would provide other Indigenous languages of the United States a template within a U.S. political context that we could use in considering our own circumstances and needs.

Due to the specialized knowledge and language proficiency needed to teach in an immersion site, it is hard to recruit and retain teachers. As well, it is often difficult for our people to pick up and leave our community to obtain a college degree and teaching license, due to family connections and support and the cultural disconnect between institutions and home (tribally-specific) culture. However, we have culturally appropriate processes that convey and transfer knowledge, and it would be helpful to appropriately put them to use in our culture-based schools and programs.

In response to the increased demand, immersion schools have had to take a grow-your-own approach to teacher training in order to ensure linguistic and cultural competence of teachers - offering jobs to Native Speakers in our communities, or from other States, or even other countries, who had a teaching degree in their home country; and by implementing initiatives and incentives for teachers to obtain Native language proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. To be culturally appropriate, there are local teacher development practices being implemented in Native American Language schools and programs that are integrated into school- or program-site operations and development projects:

- Defining and measuring locally-appropriate cultural competence
- Defining a pedagogical framework, and investing in training
- Actively monitoring staff perceptions of culture and environment
- Providing ongoing training on culturally responsive teaching techniques.

This puts an extra burden on the immersion school site to develop the training program and to fund the ongoing training that deliberately cultivates culturally inclusive environments for teachers and students. While it is burdensome, at the same time it is an opportunity for our Native education communities to determine, shape, and implement promising practices that make sense for our students, grounded in action research. This puts our local communities who are developing new teachers who teach in our languages, at the forefront of educational development. We then demonstrate our experiences and successes as models for institutions and agencies to build upon. States such as Minnesota, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Washington have passed legislation relating to teacher preparation and teacher proficiencies that created State-recognized teacher licensure in areas of Native American Languages and Community Experts (limited licensure) for Native culture and language teachers. However, these licenses are

somewhat limited in scope and do not meet requirements to teach core content areas other than those of Native Language or Native Culture. As we have stated, Native language immersion programs teach *a majority (or all, in some cases) content areas* in a Native American language. HB 024 recognizes this need and provides flexibility for school districts to nominate and bring local community experts into classrooms to teach in Native language immersion programs. The certificates are valid in the language and subject areas for which the certificate is issued, and this represents an immense step forward for promising education practices, Alaska Native language education and revitalization, and is beneficial for students, schools, and indigenous communities.

NCNALSP is pleased to support HB 024. Our member schools and programs are all familiar with the challenges of culturally appropriate teacher training, recruitment, and retention and have successfully modeled much of our work and development on a path that includes building capacity in local people who are specifically knowledgeable in the specific local culture of our area. We know that when our students see teachers and other education professionals that look like them, they do better in measures of academic and social indicators. Furthermore, we have a working relationship with Alaska Native Language practitioners and assure you that a teacher licensing and development plan done with these unique cultural aspects in mind will be highly respected and eagerly read in other states with active Native American language teaching efforts.

Again, the NCNALSP strongly supports HB 024 in taking the lead nationally in developing language planning for the revitalization and normalization of our precious languages unique to the United States, and in your case, Alaska. Miigwech/thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Leslie Harper

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