

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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House Bill 123 – An Act Providing for State Recognition of Federally Recognized Tribes

Sponsor Statement

House Bill 123 proposes to formally recognize the Tribes in this state and the first people who have governed themselves for millennia. The federal government has a special and unique relationship with Tribes that the State would formally acknowledge through this bill.

Despite the shared values between Tribes and the State that seek to ensure vibrant and healthy communities, Alaska obtained statehood during an era of federal Indian policy where the federal government sought to terminate its trust relationship with Tribes — forcing Tribes to abandon their identity, cultures, languages, and ways of life. While the federal government embraced needed change and went on to pass the Self Determination and Education Assistance Act in 1975, Alaska’s statutory policy towards Tribes is still a relic of the past.

Many of the struggles facing Alaska today, from the public safety crisis, suicide, and the epidemic of sexual assault and domestic violence have been reinforced by the state’s historic policy of telling its Tribes that they have no existence, no standing, and no recognition. It is time to break from this outdated policy and to usher in a new era that seeks to reconcile historic political divisions and all the state’s peoples to one another.

House Bill 123 serves as a first step, formalizing in statute that the State of Alaska will no longer deny Tribes’ existence. This provides not only a first step towards stronger relationships between Alaska and its tribes, but also a roadmap for healing, wholeness, and restoration of all Alaska’s people and communities.

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