

House Tribal Affairs Committee
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99081

Re: HB 123 – State Recognition of Tribes

April 21st, 2021

Dear Chair Kreiss-Tomkins and Members of the House State Affairs Committee:

Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates - Alaska (“PPAA”) writes today in support of HB 123, a bill to formally grant state recognition of federally recognized tribes. This policy is a critical first step to developing formal partnerships between the state of Alaska and Alaska Native tribes and bring healing and recognition to the state’s 229 federally recognized tribes.

Planned Parenthood’s goal of achieving health equity – including access to quality, affordable, culturally competent health care – requires actively dismantling systems that marginalize, oppress, and disenfranchise Indigenous and Native peoples. It is critical to address the violence Indigenous and Native communities continue to endure as a result of colonialism and racism and to acknowledge the enormous contributions these communities continue to make to this country. Indigenous and Native people have historically faced structural barriers to reproductive freedom due to a history of forced sterilization, family separation at the hands of the government. Formally recognizing federally recognized tribes is a critical step forward to undoing systemic racism that allows these systems to persist and place barriers to health equity.

For many years, and even today, states have inflicted trauma on Indigenous and Native people many times over by failing to recognize or respect the sovereign status of tribal nations. While the federal government legally recognizes the sovereignty of 229 Tribes, Alaska does not formally recognize tribes as independent, sovereign nations or interact with them as such. This not only leads to a patchwork of legal and governing structures, but also contributes to an ongoing source of source of trauma for Indigenous and Native people. This patchwork and systemic discrimination compounds many of the health struggles facing Indigenous and Native people today, such as high rates of depression and suicide, an epidemic of sexual assault and domestic violence, and high rates of maternal mortality.

Alaska’s formal recognition is a step in the process of centering Indigenous and Native people in decision-making that will open more opportunities for better working relationships between Tribal and state governments. HB 123’s progress toward true tribal self-determination is critical to achieving equity, improving health outcomes, and healing.

Sincerely,

Morgan Lim
Alaska Government Relations Manager
Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates - Alaska