



February 27, 2021

To: Members of the House Resources Committee

RE: HB 10: FUNTER BAY MARINE PARK: UNANGAN CEMETERY

Sealaska Heritage Institute strongly supports the protection of the Unangan cemetery as a unit of the State Parks Division, which is a matter of high cultural and historical importance to the Unangan people, as well as to the Tlingit people of Southeast Alaska who provided material assistance to them during their incarceration in the form of food and blankets. The preservation of the graveyard is significant to the relatives and descendants of those people laid to rest there, who are remembered and held sacred by their living descendants. A crucial dimension of this significance stems from the circumstances of their presence there, as incarcerated persons brought there involuntarily under extreme circumstances.

I can personally attest to the social and historical importance of this bill to the Unangan people of St. Paul and St. George from my experience with them in 1981, which I conducted research into their subsistence practices over a 3 week period. As I got to know the islanders, I soon learned about how their families were forcibly removed from their homes and taken to Southeast Alaska. They spoke to me about how they were given 1 hour to pack what they could carry with them, and to leave everything else. They were very concerned about their Russian Orthodox icons that were left behind in their churches, and which were never recovered as far as I know.

I heard about how they were taken to the wooden cannery building in Funter Bay, and how they stayed in one large room and had to hang up blankets which served as walls between the different families that were put there. Cold came through the wooden walls and plank floors of the uninsulated building. They also spoke of the shortage of food, and not knowing if they would ever return to their homes.

I worked for the National Park Service for 14 years running a research program documenting the attachments between communities and groups with social and historical connections to places that extended through generations. I learned how such places remain significant to groups even though they may have been separated by decades from their experience of the place, and how such connections remain significant to subsequent generations as part of a shared history. In the case of Funter Bay, this history is very close to the surface because it is recent, and because living families have close relatives who are buried in the cemetery.

The Tlingit peoples' ties with the Unangan people go back to the days of Russian occupation in the region when their ancestors were brought here to hunt sea otters. New relationships were formed during the WWII when Unangan people were incarcerated at several sites in Southeast Alaska.

Sincerely,

Chuck Smythe

Chuck Smythe, Ph.D.

Director, Culture and History Department





—Juneau Douglas—
CITY MUSEUM

114 W. 4th Street, Juneau, AK 998001
907-586-3572 – Beth.Weigel@juneau.org

February 10, 2021

Dear Members of the House Resources Committee,

As Director of the Juneau-Douglas City Museum, a department within the City and Borough of Juneau, I am writing in support of HB 10, “An Act relating to the Funter Bay marine park unit of the state park system; relating to protection of the social and historical significance of the Unangax cemetery located in Funter Bay and providing for the amendment of the management plan for the Funter Bay marine park unit; and providing for an effective date.”

At the beginning of 2019, a group formed to work on several initiatives related to the forced removal and internment of the Aleut people to Funter Bay and other camps during World War II. This evolving work group is made up of people affiliated with a wide range of organizations and interests from the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, the Alaska State Parks and the Alaska State Parks Citizen Advisory Board, the Museum of the Aleutians, the Friends of Admiralty Island, the Juneau-Douglas City Museum, the Juneau Public Libraries, the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island Tribal Government, the University of Alaska Southeast, Tlingit Haida Central Council, Sealaska Heritage Institute, and a representative from the offices’ of Senator Kiehl, Representative Hannan, and Representative Story. The group is both advisory and actively working on three initiatives which are to:

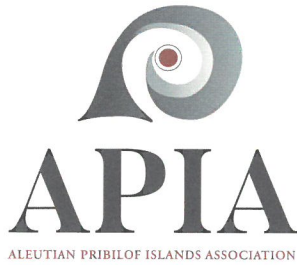
- establish protections in perpetuity around Aleut gravesites that are located on Tlingit Aaní on Admiralty Island and is currently managed by the State Department of Natural Resources;
- develop and install interpretive panels at the cemetery site and for use locally for educational and outreach purposes through State Parks and;
- mount an exhibit on the Aleut Internment at the Juneau-Douglas City Museum in summer 2020.

While the working group has gained momentum to bring these initiatives to bear, this work has been decades in the making. Since the U.S. Government removed the Aleut people “for their safety” and interned them in Funter Bay in 1942, these loyal Americans who experienced the death of their loved ones due primarily to deplorable living conditions, and the loss of their traditional homes and culture have sought reparations and to have their story and voices heard. Now more than 75 years later, you, the members of the House Resources Committee and the Legislature at large, have the opportunity to say this place, these gravesites, this story matters. With the passage of HB 10 the Aleut people and their descendants can seek healing, build a stronger community, and restore dignity and respect for those who are buried at Funter Bay.

As written by Alaska Native Brotherhood Grand President, Roy Peratrovich, at the time of internment, “It is our patriotic duty to offer every aid and comfort to these our fellow countrymen...”

Sincerely,

Beth A. Weigel, PhD
Director, Juneau-Douglas City Museum



With Spirit and Strength

February 24, 2021

Representatives & Senators of the 32nd Alaska State Legislature
Alaska State Capital
120 4th Street
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Support of HB 10: Social & Historical Significance of Funter Bay Unangax' Cemetery

Dear Honorable Representatives & Senators of the 32nd Alaska State Legislature:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill No. 10, "An Act relating to the Funter Bay marine park unit of the state park system; relating to protection of the social and historical significance of the Unangax cemetery located in Funter Bay; providing for the amendment of the management plan for the Funter Bay marine park unit; and providing for an effective date."

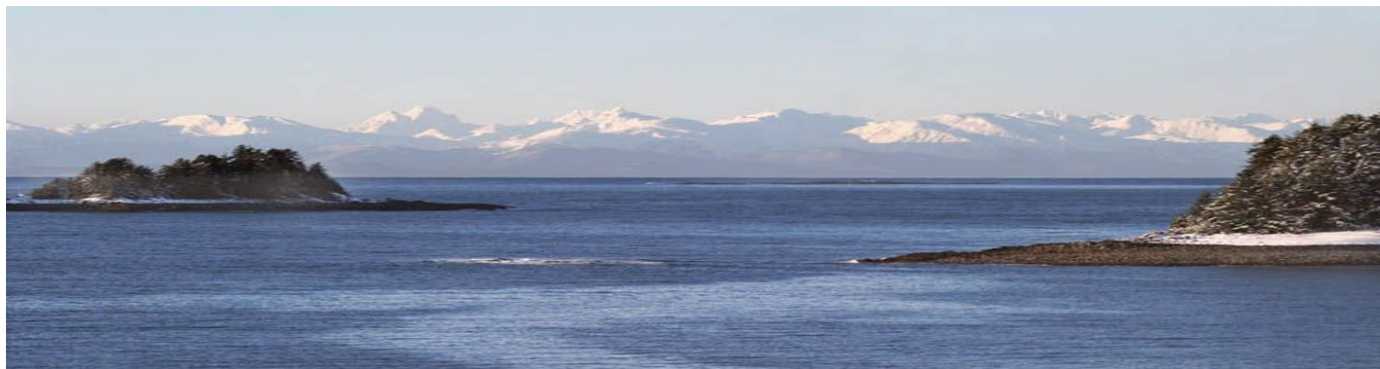
The mission of Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association includes strengthening and preserving Unangax' cultural heritage. The forced removal of about 850 Unangax'/Aleut people from our region by the United States military and the placing of these people in abandoned canneries without basic facilities where about 10% of the people died in what has been appropriately termed wrongful deaths is an important part of Unangax' /Aleut history. Thus, we appreciate Representative Sara Hannan proposing the bill, we appreciate the members of the Representatives and Senators considering this bill. We strongly urge the Representatives & Senators of the 32nd Alaska State Legislature to pass Bill No. 10 to protect the Funter Bay Unangax' cemetery.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (907) 276-2700 or dimitrip@apiai.org.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Dimitri Philemonof", is written over a large, stylized blue circular mark.

Dimitri Philemonof
President/CEO



Juneau Area State Parks Citizen Advisory Board

Photo by A. W. Hanger

**400 Willoughby Ave., Suite 500
Juneau, AK 99801**

Rep. Sara Hannan
State Capitol
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Representative Hannon,

The Juneau Area State Parks Citizen Advisory Board (JASPCAB) is writing in support of HB10 for the inclusion of the current DNR general Funter Bay lands parcel, which includes the historic Unangax Cemetery, into the boundary of Funter Bay State Marine Park.

The JASPCAB supports Alaska State Parks taking on the role to protect, manage, and inform about the importance of the cemetery and the events suffered by Unangan from St. Paul Island and St. George Island in Funter Bay during World War II. We feel the HB10 legislation is an important step for the protection and security of the cemetery as well as providing peace of mind to current and future generations of Unangan.

Thank you for this opportunity to protect this significant historical cultural resource for the Aleut community.

Respectfully,

Rory Darling
Christy Gentemann
Ric Iannolino
Joel Nudelman,
Deb Rudis
Forest Wagner
Mareta Weed

From: [Joel Bennett](#)
To: [Rep. Josiah Patkotak](#)
Cc: [Timothy Clark](#)
Subject: Support for HB 10
Date: Wednesday, February 24, 2021 1:57:52 PM

Dear Chairman Patkotak and committee members,

I strongly urge your support for HB 10.

I am a resident of Funter Bay who has owned property in close proximity to the lands designated in HB 10 for more than 30 years. In fact the northern border of my property is directly above the cemetery which is a focus of this bill.

I see no reason to object to this legislation. The land and water resources involved in the acreage designated in HB 10 have no significant commercial value. The highest and best use of these state lands is for a purpose that recognizes the historical and cultural significance of the interment of the Pribilof islanders during WW II.

You may be interested to know that Funter Bay residents on our side of the bay have taken an interest in helping to safeguard and preserve the cemetery for decades. State recognition of the important landmark is long overdue.

Yours sincerely,

Joel Bennett
Board Member, Friends of Admiralty



MUSEUM OF THE ALEUTIANS

(907) 581-5150 • 314 Salmon Way Unalaska AK 99685 P.O. Box 648 Unalaska AK 99685 • www.Aleutians.org

February 24, 2021

32nd Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Support of House Bill No. 10: Social and Historical Significance of the Funter Bay Unangax Cemetery

To the Honorable Representatives and Senators of the 32nd Alaska State Legislature:

Thank you for the opportunity to write in support of House Bill 10, an “act relating to the Funter Bay marine park unit of the state park system; relating to protection of the social and historical significance of the Unangax cemetery located in Funter Bay.”

On behalf of the Museum of the Aleutians’ board and staff, I would like to voice my strong support of this bill. The Museum of the Aleutian’s mission is to collect, preserve, and share the rich cultural history of the Aleutian Islands region.

The forced removal of approximately 850 Unangax from the Pribilof Islands by the United States government had a significant and devastating impact on their heritage. The evacuated Unangax were relocated to Funter Bay, lived in substandard conditions, and not allowed to leave except as forced labor to harvest fur seals for the US Government. The Unangax were housed in abandoned canneries without basic facilities where about 10% of the population died. Disease epidemics including the flu and measles devastated the Unangax living in these deplorable conditions. The Unangax peoples that died at the Funter Bay camp are forever at rest in the Funter Bay Unangan Cemetery, having spent the last days of their lives in the worst conditions imaginable.

The Museum of the Aleutians appreciates Representative Sara Hannan proposing HB10 and the members of the 32nd Alaska Legislature for considering this bill. As a repository that documents, collects, and preserves Unangax cultural heritage, we urge the House and Senate of the 32nd Alaska Legislature to listen to representatives of the Unangax peoples and pass House Bill 10 ensuring the protection of the gravesites of the Unangax laid to rest at Funter Bay.

For any further questions, please contact me at (907) 581-5150 or virginiahatfield@aleutians.org.

Regards, 

Virginia Hatfield
Executive Director





Northern Light United Church

To: Members of the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs

Regarding: House Bill 10, protection of the Unangax Cemetary at Funter Bay

March 7, 2021

The Northern Light United Church Council supports the passage of House Bill 10, relating to the protection of the social and historical significance of the Unangax cemetery located in Funter Bay; providing for the amendment of the management plan for the Funter Bay marine park unit.

Northern Light United Church hosted a potluck and reception there on February 10, 2020. We listened to elders and leaders from St. George and St. Paul describe what it was like for their parents to be interned at Funter Bay during WWII. They had travelled to Juneau to testify in support of protecting their relatives' graves at Funter Bay.

Our church is noted for supporting social justice issues in the community, the region, and the state, including demonstrating respect for and acknowledging the contributions of Alaska Native people. Northern Light United Church supports our Unungan brothers and sisters in their pursuit of protection for their ancestors' graves.

Respectfully yours,

Marianne Mills
Council Moderator

Cc: Pastor Faith McClellan

*The Mission of Northern Light United Church is
to make Disciples of Jesus Christ through God-centered Worship and People-centered Ministries*



February 23, 2021

32nd Alaska State Legislature

Re: HB 10 - Social and Historical Significance of the Funter Bay Unangan Cemetery

To the Honorable Representatives and Senators of the 32nd Alaska State Legislature:

I write to you today on behalf of the Tanadgusix Corporation (TDX) Board of Directors, its shareholders and descendants, who originate from St Paul, Alaska. TDX is the village corporation formed under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, to serve shareholders and their descendants from Saint Paul, Alaska.

Our mothers, fathers, grandparents, great grandparents and other relatives were evacuated from Saint Paul when on June 16, 1942, the *U.S.S. Delaroff* arrived unannounced and told the people they had one day to prepare, to only bring one blanket and one bag. The people of Saint George were rushed to pack and board immediately. From Saint George, the *Delaroff* went to Unalaska, where the people of Atka were loaded on. By this time, many Unangan people had intermarried, but their non-indigenous spouses were left behind.

The people of the Pribilof Islands were the property of the federal government, living in servitude to collect furs on behalf of the national treasury. The fur industry in the Pribilofs was a key driver leading up to "Seward's Folly", the purchase of Alaska from the Russian American Company. The federal government kept the Pribilofs very secluded, their enslavement of the people a secret practice, perpetuated by the US Government following the purchase of Alaska. The Unangan people were forbidden from leaving Funter Bay in a deliberate effort to keep them from experiencing a world other than that known in the Pribilofs. The first summer the men were in Funter Bay, the federal government lost a million dollars in revenue. All the men were forced to return to the Pribilofs for the seal harvest the second summer, threatened with losing everything they had left behind and to not be allowed to return to their families. While home, they were forced to live in bunkhouses while military personnel occupied their homes.

In Funter Bay, while the men were harvesting skins for a nickel each in the Pribilofs, measles and the flu spread through the camps. At least 19 people died from measles. The flu took many more lives, as the conditions at Funter Bay were deplorable.

This part of the Pribilof Unangan history is both heart-wrenching, and ironically, when despair became hope for the future, turning the tide for our people. Our men experienced real wages washing dishes and performing other jobs in Juneau, where they were paid a lot more than what they earned harvesting seal for furs. They met men from the Alaska Native



Brotherhood, and with the help of William Paul, Felix Cohen and others, were able to begin what would become a successful fair and honorable dealings lawsuit against the federal government.

This is a very short version of this history that is not only important to the Unangan people but should be important to our State and our Nation. Our relatives who perished while at Funter Bay are interred at the Funter Bay Unangan Cemetery, having spent the last days of their lives in the worst conditions they ever experienced.

As family and descendants of the people interred at Funter Bay, we urge the House and Senate of the 32nd Alaska Legislature to pass HB 10 to forever protect the gravesite of the Unangan at Funter Bay, as they sacrificed their lives and homes for the War on behalf of the nation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Beverly Woods". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Beverly Woods
Chair