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Tribal Affairs Committee
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801
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HB 384 – Definition of “Victim Counseling Center”

The Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA), the federally recognized state coalition of twenty-four community-based domestic violence and sexual assault service providers supports the introduction and passage of HB384.

When the confidentiality statute located in AS 18.66.200-250 was created to ensure all victims of domestic and sexual violence had access to a counselor who could hold every word they said to them in confidence, with limited exceptions, it included the types of organizations in the definition of “victim counseling center” that were doing the work across the state at that time.

Since the original passage of the statute, the federal government has recognized the need to ensure that tribal governments have access to victim services funds and Alaska tribes are now serving victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Unfortunately, there have not been corresponding updates to the confidentiality definitions. At this time victim counselors working for tribal government funded victim counseling centers do not have the same privilege given to other victim counselors across the state.

Having an advocate who can hold privileged conversations with the victim ensures that the victim can feel safe sharing information knowing that it cannot be used as evidence in court or with outside parties without their written consent. This allows the victim to control their own information at a time when control has been taken from them by the victimization.

HB384 adds two words “and tribal” into the statute. These two words will ensure that all communication between a victim and a counselor working for a tribal government funded victim counseling center is held in the strictest confidence.

We appreciate the introduction of this important piece of legislation and the recognition of its importance to victims across the State of Alaska.

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