

HOUSE BILL NO. 387

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY THE HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Introduced: 4/24/26

Referred: Education

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

1 **"An Act establishing the Joint Legislative Alaska Native Languages Academic Task**
2 **Force."**

3 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

4 * **Section 1.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section
5 to read:

6 LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS. The legislature finds that

7 (1) the state has long recognized the cultural, historical, and linguistic
8 significance of Alaska Native languages, all of which are endangered, and most of which are
9 at risk of losing their remaining fluent speakers within the next decade;

10 (2) the Alaska Native Language Center was established by the legislature in
11 1972 to serve as the primary institution for the study, documentation, preservation, and
12 revitalization of Alaska Native languages;

13 (3) the Alaska Native Language Center is legislatively mandated to document
14 languages, develop literacy materials, assist in translation, promote Alaska Native literature,

1 and train speakers to serve as bilingual educators;

2 (4) decades of academic research conducted through the Alaska Native
3 Language Center and affiliated scholars represents an irreplaceable body of linguistic,
4 cultural, and educational knowledge;

5 (5) recent reports indicate that the Alaska Native Language Center faces
6 significant challenges that include budget constraints, staffing shortages, lack of permanent
7 leadership, and reduced research capacity, which threaten the center's ability to fulfill its
8 mission;

9 (6) the loss of tenure-track and tenured faculty, research staff, publications
10 capacity, and institutional support jeopardizes the development of literacy materials and the
11 continued documentation and dissemination of Alaska Native languages;

12 (7) the number of qualified linguistic specialists in many Alaska Native
13 languages is extremely limited, in some cases numbering only a handful worldwide, which
14 underscores the urgency of preserving existing academic research;

15 (8) the development of teaching materials for Alaska Native languages
16 requires extensive long-term academic research, which often takes decades, particularly for
17 languages with limited written documentation;

18 (9) the absence of coordinated oversight, long-term funding strategies, and
19 statutory clarity may contribute to systemic vulnerabilities in the preservation of academic
20 research related to Alaska Native languages;

21 (10) partnerships between the University of Alaska system, Alaska Native
22 communities, tribal organizations, and external academic institutions are critical to sustaining
23 and expanding research and preservation efforts;

24 (11) the state has yet to develop a long-term vision for Alaska Native
25 languages that includes budget increases to the Alaska Native Language Center in particular;
26 and

27 (12) it is in the interest of the state to ensure that Alaska Native language
28 teacher training, academic research, documentation, and scholarly infrastructure supporting
29 Alaska Native languages are preserved, strengthened, and made accessible for future
30 generations.

31 * **Sec. 2.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to

1 read:

2 JOINT LEGISLATIVE ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGES ACADEMIC TASK
3 FORCE. (a) The Joint Legislative Alaska Native Languages Academic Task Force is
4 established in the legislature for the purpose of furthering the instruction and preservation of
5 Alaska Native languages. The task force shall convene not later than 90 days after the
6 effective date of this Act.

7 (b) The task force membership consists of

8 (1) three members of the house of representatives, appointed by the speaker of
9 the house of representatives; and

10 (2) three members of the senate, appointed by the president of the senate.

11 (c) The task force shall

12 (1) hold public meetings and solicit input from communities and experts in the
13 field of Alaska Native languages;

14 (2) conduct a comprehensive review of the current state of academic activities
15 related to Alaska Native languages within the University of Alaska system, including

16 (A) Alaska Native language teacher training programs;

17 (B) research archives, publications, and linguistic documentation;

18 (C) staffing levels, faculty expertise, and leadership structures;

19 (D) institutional capacity for sustaining long-term research efforts; and

20 (E) opportunities for career advancement for Alaska Native language
21 teachers;

22 (3) evaluate academic and institutional approaches to impactful and relevant
23 linguistic research, including

24 (A) digital archiving and data sovereignty practices;

25 (B) methods for integrating research into curriculum and teacher
26 training;

27 (C) comparative review of models used by other states, Indigenous
28 communities, and international institutions; and

29 (D) access to physical and digital materials by language learners and
30 language schools and programs;

31 (4) assess risks to the preservation of research regarding Alaska Native

- 1 languages, including
- 2 (A) workforce shortages and loss of expertise;
- 3 (B) gaps in funding and administrative support;
- 4 (C) vulnerabilities in data storage, access, and ownership; and
- 5 (D) low morale relating to treatment of former Alaska Native
- 6 Language Center employees;
- 7 (5) examine partnership opportunities with Alaska Native tribes and
- 8 organizations, national and international universities, federal agencies, nonprofit
- 9 organizations, and publishing and digital archiving institutions;
- 10 (6) recommend statutory updates relating to
- 11 (A) the recruitment, retention, and training of Alaska Native language
- 12 teachers;
- 13 (B) the development of Alaska Native language schools and programs
- 14 across the state;
- 15 (C) legislative support for Alaska Native language research and stable
- 16 and sustained funding mechanisms for Alaska Native language research; and
- 17 (D) institutional responsibilities within the University of Alaska
- 18 system; and
- 19 (7) recommend strategies to ensure
- 20 (A) growth in the number of licensed and certified teachers of Alaska
- 21 Native languages in the state;
- 22 (B) growth in the recruitment, retention, and training of qualified
- 23 linguistic researchers;
- 24 (C) the continued documentation, description, and publication of
- 25 materials on Alaska Native languages;
- 26 (D) long-term growth and accessibility of Alaska Native language
- 27 academic research;
- 28 (E) expansion of research capacity and publication efforts; and
- 29 (F) alignment with community priorities and cultural protocols.
- 30 (d) In performing the duties of the task force under this section, the task force shall
- 31 prioritize

1 (1) the urgent need to strengthen and preserve endangered Alaska Native
2 languages;

3 (2) maintaining respect for Indigenous knowledge systems and community
4 leadership; and

5 (3) continuing the legislature's original intent in establishing the Alaska Native
6 Language Center.

7 (e) The task force may

8 (1) accept appropriations from the legislature; and

9 (2) meet virtually.

10 (f) Not later than one year after the first meeting of the task force, the task force shall
11 submit a final report with findings and recommendations made under (c) of this section to the
12 senate secretary and the chief clerk of the house of representatives and notify the legislature
13 that the report is available.

14 * **Sec. 3.** The Joint Legislative Alaska Native Languages Academic Task Force terminates
15 December 31, 2027.