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From: Mackenzie Englishoe [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, April 28, 2026 12:52 PM
Subject: Re: Letter of Support of SB 287 and HB 387

On Tue, Apr 28, 2026 at 12:46 PM Mackenzie Englishoe [REDACTED] wrote:

Dear Alaska State Legislators,

My name is Mackenzie Englishoe, and I am writing in strong support of SB 287 and HB 387, "An Act establishing the Joint Alaska Native Languages Academic Task Force."

As an Alaska Native young person, this issue is not abstract to me, it is deeply personal. I come from Fort Yukon, a place where our language, Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa, lives in our community, our families, and our Elders. Growing up, I understood that our language is more than just words. It is how we understand the world, how we connect to one another, and how we carry forward the teachings of those who came before us.

There came a point in my life where I knew I had a responsibility to learn my language more deeply. That decision led me to leave my home in Fort Yukon and move away from my community in order to take a Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa class with my teacher, Sam Alexander. That was not an easy decision. Leaving home, family, and community is never easy, especially when those are the very places that hold your identity. But I made that choice because I knew that opportunities to learn our language in a structured, supported way are limited, and I could not let that opportunity pass.

Before I made that decision, I remember sitting with my Auntie, speaking with her about whether I should go. She told me that this was a chance to learn from someone who is respected, knowledgeable, and someone who truly cares about our people and our language. She told me she was proud of him, and that I would learn a lot. That moment stayed with me, and it gave me the strength to take that step.

Learning Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa has been more than just a class for me. It has been a journey of

reconnecting to who I am. It has been challenging, emotional, and deeply meaningful. It has shown me how much responsibility we carry as young people to learn what was almost taken from us, and to carry it forward in a good way.

At the same time, I have seen how fragile these opportunities are. We are at a point where we are losing fluent speakers, many of whom are our Elders, the ones who hold the deepest knowledge of our languages. Access to consistent, strong language education is limited, and the programs and institutions that support this work are not always given the support they need to continue.

Institutions like the Alaska Native Language Center, along with language instructors, professors, and researchers, play a critical role in this work. They are helping create pathways for young people like me to learn, to reconnect, and to become future teachers and leaders in language revitalization. Without that support, those pathways begin to disappear.

That is why this legislation matters.

The creation of a Joint Alaska Native Languages Academic Task Force is not just another policy decision. It is a necessary step toward ensuring that there is coordination, accountability, and long-term support for Alaska Native language revitalization. It has the potential to bring together the knowledge of Elders, educators, communities, and institutions to strengthen language programs across the state.

We need more than acknowledgement that our languages are important. We need action that reflects that importance.

For me, this is about my family, my community, and my future. It is about making sure that the next generation does not have to leave home just to access opportunities to learn their language. It is about making sure that our languages are still here, spoken, lived, and passed on.

This is more than policy.
This is Indigenous education.
This is cultural survival.
This is our responsibility.

I respectfully urge you to support and pass SB 287 and HB 387.

Mahsi cho for your time, your consideration, and your commitment to Alaska's future.

Mahsi choo (big thanks),
Mackenzie Englishoe
Tribal citizen of Gwichyaa Zhee
Youth Advisor, Tanana Chiefs Conference Executive Board
Chair of the Emerging Leaders Youth Advisory Council