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**CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 287(STA)**

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

**BY THE SENATE STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**Offered:  
Referred:**

**Sponsor(s): SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**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, at least one of whom is a  
9 member of the minority, appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives; and

10 (2) three members of the senate, at least one of whom is a member of the  
11 minority, appointed by the president of the senate.

12 (c) The task force shall

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

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

17 (A) Alaska Native language teacher training programs;

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

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

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

21 (E) opportunities for career advancement for Alaska Native language

22 teachers;

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

25 (A) digital archiving and data sovereignty practices;

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

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

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

1 (4) assess risks to the preservation of research regarding Alaska Native  
2 languages, including

3 (A) workforce shortages and loss of expertise;

4 (B) gaps in funding and administrative support; and

5 (C) vulnerabilities in data storage, access, and ownership;

6 (5) examine partnership opportunities with Alaska Native tribes and  
7 organizations, national and international universities, federal agencies, nonprofit  
8 organizations, and publishing and digital archiving institutions;

9 (6) recommend statutory updates relating to

10 (A) the recruitment, retention, and training of Alaska Native language  
11 teachers;

12 (B) the development of Alaska Native language schools and programs  
13 across the state;

14 (C) legislative support for Alaska Native language research and stable  
15 and sustained funding mechanisms for Alaska Native language research; and

16 (D) institutional responsibilities within the University of Alaska  
17 system; and

18 (7) recommend strategies to ensure

19 (A) growth in the number of licensed and certified teachers of Alaska  
20 Native languages in the state;

21 (B) growth in the recruitment, retention, and training of qualified  
22 linguistic researchers;

23 (C) the continued documentation, description, and publication of  
24 materials on Alaska Native languages;

25 (D) long-term growth and accessibility of Alaska Native language  
26 academic research;

27 (E) expansion of research capacity and publication efforts; and

28 (F) alignment with community priorities and cultural protocols.

29 (d) In performing the duties of the task force under this section, the task force shall  
30 prioritize

31 (1) the urgent need to strengthen and preserve endangered Alaska Native

1 languages;

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

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

6 (e) The task force may

7 (1) accept appropriations from the legislature; and

8 (2) meet virtually.

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

13 \* **Sec. 3.** The Joint Legislative Alaska Native Languages Academic Task Force, established  
14 in sec. 2 of this Act, terminates on December 31, 2027.