

House State Affairs Committee, HB 325 testimony, February 13, 2018

My name is Talia Eames and I am here as the coordinator for Tlingit & Haida's Second Chance Reentry Program. I am also a 10-year, decorated veteran of the United States Air Force. Gunalchéesh for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 325.

When I worked as a caseworker for the reentry program, I met with over 300 men and women returning from incarceration. Although the program was open to tribal and non-tribal members, Alaska Natives were overwhelmingly represented in my office. One of the most significant hurdles for individuals released from incarceration is access to services. The services they can access may not be culturally appropriate or broad enough to give them the tools they need to lower their risks of recidivating. From lack of transportation the moment they are released, to finding housing, medical care, employment, identification cards, or substance use treatment, returning citizens face huge hurdles to their own well-being. There are no comprehensive reentry services in Southeast Alaska and of the services that do exist, cultural components incorporated into these approaches are either non-existent or underdeveloped.

In addition to the need for strong sober support and guidance to services, many tribal members have lost touch with their tribal identity while incarcerated and experience broken ties with their Native families due to addictions and violations in trust. Participants in the Second Chance Program regularly cited the need for cultural identity but had to be self-taught due to these circumstances, limited resources, and being paroled away from their home communities where the knowledge lives. The healing associated with practicing cultural traditions, learning clan identity and having pride in where you come from is something long respected by Native American people and can assist in reducing recidivism.

Due to the uniqueness of Alaska tribes having only one reservation and no criminal jurisdiction in the state, our tribes have limited established infrastructure when it comes to creating reentry and rehabilitative programs. This often results in tribal entities that are unable to compete under current procurement codes. This also means that many programs are being established without the invaluable resources that our tribes hold. Allowing the State of Alaska an exemption in current procurement rules would open up many possibilities in empowering tribes to care for our own in the reentry process. A cheaper bid is just that when it cannot reduce recidivism and keeps open the proverbial "revolving door." The future of public safety and healthy communities relies in promoting programs that truly help the formerly incarcerated to keep them from returning to prison; in my work I recognize these programs to be where we strengthen our broken tribal members by incorporating traditional sources of healing and knowledge in the reentry and rehabilitative support systems. This is why I support House Bill 325 and ask that you consider the same.

Thank you,



Talia Eames

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