



ALASKA
NATIVE
HERITAGE
CENTER

March 1, 2018

Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HCR 19 Urging Governor Walker to Issue an Administrative Order Recognizing Linguistic Emergency

Dear Legislators,

Thank you for this opportunity to connect with you regarding the Alaska Native linguistic emergency we face. I write to endorse HCR 19, a measure that supports the survival and continued use of all twenty of the state's Alaska Native languages. Every Alaska Native language has suffered an ongoing loss in the number of speakers over the years. If current rates of decline continue, all Alaska Native languages may lose their fluent speakers within decades.

Carefully-planned language programs can make a big impact on reversing language loss. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), states:

"It is estimated that, if nothing is done, half of 6000 plus languages spoken today will disappear by the end of this century. However, this process is neither inevitable nor irreversible: well-planned and implemented language policies can bolster the ongoing efforts of speaker communities to maintain or revitalize their mother tongues and pass them on to younger generations."

With HCR 19, the State of Alaska can influence and align language policy and planning through state departments to support the hard work of many Alaskans around the state who work to save these precious and renewable cultural resources. Particularly, languages are an incredible investment in closing the achievement gap for Alaska Native youth.

The Alaska Native Heritage Center (ANHC) is one of many organizations working to strengthen and protect the languages of Alaska's Native communities. Our focus is on building capacity for developing and implementing language immersion programs. For the past four years, ANHC built its language immersion programs, and in 2017 through a groundbreaking partnership with Cook Inlet Native Head Start, Anchorage's first pre-K Yup'ik immersion option opened in Anchorage. We continue to explore new ways to use language to support Alaskans, from school-age children building self-confidence and cultural identity to Elders rediscovering their language and heritage after years of discrimination and isolation.

This work has only just begun. Development of innovative, transformative, and community-focused approaches is vital to reversing the trend of language loss.

Thank you for your commitment to empowering our Alaska Native community to address this serious issue of language loss. The Alaska Native Heritage Center proudly supports HCR 19, and we urge you to join us in our efforts to preserve, restore, and revitalize Alaska Native languages in the state.

Sincerely,

Annette Evans Smith
President & CEO