



ALASKA FEDERATION  
OF NATIVES

# Memorandum

**To:** Grier Hopkins, Aide to Senator Joe Thomas  
**From:** Adrian LeCornu, Special Assistant AFN  
**Date:** 1/26/2011  
**Re:** Testimony in regards to SB 31

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Attached to this is the Testimony of Ralph Anderson, Co-Chair of Alaska Federation of Natives. Alaska Federation of Natives is the largest Alaska Native group within the state of Alaska, representing over 190 villages and tribal councils, 11 non-profits and 12 of the largest corporations in the state.

While we do not take a position on SB 31, we do support the language within the bill and believe that it strikes the right tone. If this bill were to be merged with others or amended, we would like a chance to review the resulting bill to insure that the tone of this bill is not lost.

We would like to submit the attached document for the Alaska Senate State Affairs committee's consideration. We thank you for taking up this issue.



ALASKA FEDERATION  
OF NATIVES

**Testimony of  
Ralph Andersen, Co-Chair  
Board of Directors  
Alaska Federation of Natives**

TESTIMONY before State Affairs Committee, Senate Bill 31, 27<sup>th</sup> Alaska Legislature

For the record, my name is Ralph Andersen. I am Co-Chair of the Alaska Federation of Natives' Board of Directors. AFN is the largest and oldest statewide Alaska Native organization in Alaska. Its membership includes the 13 regional Native corporations, 12 regional non-profits that contract and run federal and state programs and over 200 villages and tribes throughout the State. Our organization represents about 100,000 Alaska Natives from all around this state.

I would like to preface my comments today by noting that the AFN Board has taken no formal position on this bill. With that being said, we do believe that a bill that addresses our concerns and the concerns of many Alaska residents should be moved along and passed. The events that prompted this bill were historic and are now well documented, not only politically, but also legally with the action of the Alaska Supreme Court.

Our belief has always been and will continue to be the enfranchisement of those we represent. We would hope that the committee would consider the demographics in Alaska, and especially those in rural Alaska. There are many diverse cultures in this State and many Alaska residents whose first language is not English. In parts of rural Alaska one primary Alaska Native language is spoken with a rudimentary knowledge and use of English. Members of the Committee should also consider the population dynamics of their own districts. In Anchorage, for example, you could find over 87 different languages spoken in homes, and not everyone has achieved total fluency of the English language.<sup>i</sup>

There are also questions around education, and the ability to read and write in English. Reading and writing for some is challenging, not to mention the additional challenges faced by those with learning disabilities. We want to avoid creating a law that disenfranchises people because of their education, being impaired or handicapped, and as a result unintentionally or mistakenly placing the wrong vote.

With these considerations, I am certain you understand that memorizing the exact correct spelling of candidates' names may be difficult, even for those with a good education. We support the language on Page 2, Line 27-29 of the bill that "In counting votes for a write-in candidate, the election board shall disregard any abbreviation, misspelling, or other minor variation in the form of the name of a candidate if the intention of the voter can be ascertained." We believe this language is affirmative on the rights of the voter. I thank you for allowing these comments to be included for the record.

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<sup>i</sup> Anchorage School District