



Senator Scott Kawasaki  
State Capitol Room 119  
Juneau, AK 99801

Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
State Capitol Room 427  
Juneau, AK 99801

April 23, 2025

RE: SB167 Crim. Conv. Overturned: Receive Past PFD

Dear Members of Senate State Affairs,

Tanana Chiefs Conference is an Alaska Native non-profit corporation, charged with advancing Tribal self-determination and enhancing regional Native unity. We are the traditional tribal consortium of 37 federally recognized tribes within 42 interior Alaskan communities. For the past 50 years, TCC has been a voice advocating for tribal sovereignty, tribal unity and the priorities of interior Alaskan villages.

Almost a decade ago, Tanana Chiefs Conference celebrated the release from incarceration of the four men known as the Fairbanks Four: Marvin Roberts, George Frese, Eugene Vent and Kevin Pease. These men had maintained their innocence for 19 years. Post conviction relief is not a quick process, nor an easy one. After taking their formative years, the State did not provide these men with any type of reparation to transition back into daily life.

Despite their proven innocence, the difficulty of reentering society is profound for the wrongfully convicted; the failure to compensate them adds insult to injury. Society has an obligation to promptly provide compassionate assistance to the wrongfully convicted

The process to guarantee true justice for people that have experienced wrongful conviction is a long one and the fight is not popular or a priority. To ensure that no more Alaska Native men and women are falsely imprisoned, wrongfully convicted or victimized by the Alaska criminal justice system, many things must be examined and rehabilitated. True reform should involve oversight and training of law enforcement on false confessions, custodial interrogations and preservation of evidence best practices.

Reform must include examination of charging and sentencing disparity as it applies to both rural and urban Alaska Natives and all Alaskans. Prosecutorial misconduct and the mechanisms for accountability of State officials need to be codified with real and meaningful sanctions available. Eyewitness identification reform, access to post-conviction DNA testing, these reforms and the subsequent change in law that is required is the type of work that the now defunct Criminal Justice Commission could have accomplished. Tanana Chiefs Conference supports all the reforms above, this year and every year, until lasting change is achieved. We ask for your support in our endeavors.



Currently, the federal government, the District of Columbia and 38 states have compensation statutes. Twelve states do not. When we first wrote this letter back in 2017, that number was twenty. Alaska remains one of those twelve. This is not an honored distinction. Please support this important legislation. Senate Bill 167 is an important first step in ensuring the integrity of our criminal justice system.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BR' followed by a stylized flourish.

Brian Ridley  
Chief/Chairman  
Tanana Chiefs Conference