

NANA

REGIONAL CORPORATION, INC.



The Honorable Donny Olson
State Senate
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

January 16, 2012

Dear Senator Olson:

NANA Regional Corporation supports Senate Bill 130, "An Act establishing in the Office of the Governor an advisory council for the preservation, restoration, and revitalization of Alaska Native languages" as well as its companion bill, House Bill 254. NANA appreciates that the passage of this bill would provide a mechanism for recommendation to the Governor of the establishment or reorganization of programs to support preservation, restoration and revitalization of Alaska Native languages. Many Alaska Native languages, which include Iñupiaq dialects found in the NANA Region, are in danger of becoming extinct. Alaska Native Languages are the key to preserving and perpetuating Alaska Native cultural ideas, philosophies and traditions as well as the rich and common history of the State of Alaska. The Alaska Native Language and Advisory Council would be a powerful tool to bring language specialists together to share best practices and to identify programs and funding tools that can be used to address the urgent issue before us. The benefits of preserving and perpetuating Alaska Native languages, especially in youth, go beyond preserving history, traditions and culture; they directly impact the health and well-being of Alaska residents, the statewide economy, and the long term sustainability and success of the State of Alaska.

Benefits Beyond Tradition:

The benefits of revitalizing and perpetuating Alaska Native languages are not limited to continuing traditions. Revitalizing Alaska Native languages will preserve Alaska's rich history and diversity while reinforcing positive Alaska Native identity in Alaska Native youth. Positive reinforcement of Alaska Native identities in students can reduce youth suicide rates and decrease youth substance abuse. Native American language immersion schools throughout the United States (for example, Piegan Institute in Browning, Montana; Tsehootsooi Dine Bi olta in Fort Defiance, Arizona; Cherokee Immersion in Tahlequah, Oklahoma) show increased academic performance, lower suicide rates and reduced disciplinary problems. Improvement of academic performance is related to better testing scores, increased graduation rates and can increase the percentage of students obtaining a post-secondary education. In the long run, Native language programs contribute to the sustainability of communities by contributing to economic development and local capacity building as well as improvements in public safety.

Barriers to Revitalization, Preservation and Perpetuation:

There are significant barriers to perpetuating the Iñupiaq language in northwest Alaska, but organizations within the region are working hard to surmount existing obstacles. In 2005, the Aqqaluk Trust, a non-profit organization dedicated to education and language and cultural preservation that NANA contributes to, and the Native Village of

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Kotzebue surveyed the Northwest Arctic Borough. The survey showed that only 14% of the Borough's residents understand Iñupiaq fluently. The survey also found that 92% of speakers are over the age of 65. The median age of the Borough is currently 24 years old. These data show that we are faced with an uphill battle to preserve and perpetuate our language.

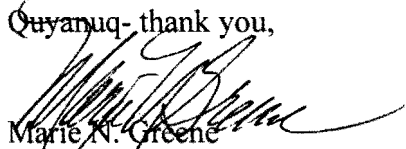
NANA, through the Aqqaluk Trust, is supporting efforts to revitalize and perpetuate the Iñupiaq language. NANA entered a unique partnership with Rosetta Stone to produce an interactive computer learning program as part of the Rosetta Stone Endangered Language Program. Software for the two predominant dialects in our region are available to our shareholders and the public. An additional effort to perpetuate our language – a gem in our region – is the Nikaitchaut Ilisagviat immersion school in Kotzebue. While the efforts in our region have contributed to the perpetuation of the Iñupiaq language, greater institutional change is needed. These programs have limited audiences of learners. This coupled with limited funding to support Alaska Native language efforts, access to youth in public schools and access to adult language programs threaten to widen the generational gap between Iñupiaq speakers and non-speakers.

Coming together for Solutions:

On behalf of NANA, thank you for elevating this important issue by introducing SB 130. It would be invaluable for the Council to work with the Governor's Office to create real solutions to preserving and perpetuating Alaska Native Languages. As you know, the solutions will require a team effort and a multi-pronged approach from the State, private entities and local communities. The Alaska Native Language and Advisory Council would provide a forum to identify solutions by bringing together resources from across the state to share what is working, what is not working, and how the State of Alaska and other entities can work together to ensure that our Alaska Native languages are not extinct, but are a thriving part of our communities.

NANA supports the passage of Senate Bill 130 and suggests that you consider Linda Lee, Lorena Williams, Polly Agnik Schaeffer and Barbara Atoruk, all Iñupiaq language experts, resources for the Alaska Native Language and Advisory Council and the Alaska State Legislature.

Quyanuk- thank you,


Marie N. Greene

President/CEO

NANA Regional Corporation