

NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH

P.O. Box 1110

Kotzebue, Alaska 99752

(907) 442.2500 or (800) 478.1110

Fax: (907) 442.3740 or 2930

December 30, 2011

Senator Donald Olson
Alaska State Capitol Room 508
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Senator Olson:

Quyanaq for introducing SB 130 to establish an Alaska Native Language and Advisory Council within the State of Alaska. The Northwest Arctic Borough supports this bill and encourages the legislature to work together to pass the bill as way to begin preserving and advancing our proud cultural heritage as Alaskans.

As background, all Alaska Native languages are considered endangered or severely endangered by linguists, and the tragic loss of Eyak in 2008 underscores the universal vulnerability of Alaska Native languages. The continued erosion or disappearance of Alaskan cultural identities has social implications for our state's civil society – including depression, self-destructive behaviors and community shame.

Within the Borough/NANA Region, the Iñupiaq language has been in serious decline. In 2005 the Aqqaluk Trust with the Native Village of Kotzebue designed and administered a regional language survey of 4,112 households throughout the Northwest Arctic region's 11 communities. This survey was the most comprehensive survey of Iñupiatun speaking and understanding ability in the Northwest Arctic. Data from the 2005 regional survey were prepared by the McDowell Group, and according to the data:

- Only 18% (739) indicated understanding the Iñupiaq language well, while just 3% (113) indicated understanding the language well but hardly speaking.
- Just over 14% can speak the Iñupiaq language fluently.

Our Borough Comprehensive Plan (1993) recognizes the issues that maintaining traditional values and activities are important to the social, cultural and economic well-being of residents and whole communities. The plan recommends supporting these values including Iñupiaq language activities through education programs, land management and other Borough programs.

The Borough assembly through resolution 10-61 (see attached) recognized that our Alaska Native languages are inherently valuable and constitute vital sources of identity for all Alaskans, and reinforces positive cultural, geographic, and humanistic ties

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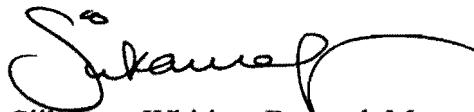
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that make us globally unique. The valuable importance of our Iñupiaq language can increase cultural heritage, support sustainable communities, and encourage collaboration among generations (Elders to youth) in various projects and programs throughout the region and state.

The Borough supports SB 130 as a method to build statewide advocacy, research and corpus on behalf of Alaska Native language revitalization efforts, and support greater cooperation between stakeholders that is urgently needed to initiate or maintain language revitalization initiatives in all Alaskan communities.

If you have any questions, please contact myself or Ukallaysaaq Tom Okleasik, Planning Director / Northwest Arctic Borough / PO Box 1110 / Kotzebue, AK 99752 / Phone 907-442-2500 / Fax 907-442-2930.

Sincerely,



Siikauraq Whiting, Borough Mayor

Cc: Ukallaysaaq Tom Okleasik, Planning Director
Puya Bob Schaeffer, Public Services Director
Linc Saito, Economic Development Director