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Representative Neal Foster

3/5/2012

State Capitol Room 434

Juneau, AK, 99801

RE: House Bill 336

Honorable Representative Foster:

Kawerak, Inc., is a regional Native non-profit, serving 20 Tribes in the Bering Strait. Kawerak supports HB 336 because it will provide needed heating assistance next winter, and will help the state move forward towards an assistance program that truly meets our needs.

This winter is particularly difficult. January 2012 was the coldest month on record. Heating degree days are 23% above average. At the same time fuel oil costs an average of \$6.33 / gallon across the Bering Strait region. Prices over \$7 are not uncommon.

Today, high energy costs, aggravated by low income and high unemployment, are increasing the burden in our already economically distressed communities. As energy prices rise, the amount of money available for household necessities dwindles, and the quality of life is suffering as a consequence. HB336 provides the security we need for the coming year.

Kawerak supports section two of HB336 because it moves us forward towards a program that better meets our needs. It directs the Governor's office to evaluate different ways to provide heating assistance, and to make recommendations to the legislature next session.

Honorable Representative Foster, Kawerak feels it is important to pass legislation issuing energy vouchers, and studying options for future energy assistance this session. This will help insure residents will have the energy they need next winter, and will put us on the course towards a program that meets Alaska's energy needs during years to come.

Melanie Bahnke, Executive Vice-President