

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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SPONSOR STATEMENT HB 216

HB 216 will allow for 20 different Alaska Native languages to become official languages of the state of Alaska, along with English. HB 216 is a symbolic gesture, similar to Forget-Me-Nots and Chinook Salmon being the official flower and fish of the state of Alaska.

In current state law, English is the only official language of Alaska. The bill would expand the list to include Iñupiaq, Siberian Yupik, Central Alaskan Yup'ik, Alutiiq, Unangaġ, Dena'ina, Deg Xinag, Holikachuk, Koyukon, Upper Kuskokwim, Gwich'in, Tanana, Upper Tanana, Tanacross, Hän, Ahtna, Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian.

The bill proposal may be symbolic, it is however, an important step in recognizing the living, breathing, Alaska Native languages of the state of Alaska, which continue to grow into daily use by many speakers around the state who both practice and teach as has been done for millennia prior to statehood.