

# First Alaskans Institute

March 27, 2014

To the Alaska Legislature,

First Alaskans Institute (FAI), a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to advancing Alaska Native peoples, strongly supports HB 216, a bill recognizing Alaska Native languages as official languages of the state. We are excited to note that this bill has bipartisan support, introduced by Representatives Kreiss-Tomkins, Millet, Edgmon, Nageak, Herron, Gara, and Guttenberg. We thank them for their vision and for understanding the necessity of this legislation.

Reasonable people agree that time is of the essence in revitalizing Alaska Native languages. State and federal actions that have been complicit in the decimation of the languages now play a vital policy role in restoring them and ensuring that Alaska is on the right side of history when it comes to its treatment of indigenous peoples, cultures and languages. We therefore urge unanimous support by all of Alaska's legislators to pass this bill this session.

As the birthplace of these diverse indigenous languages, Alaska has a unique role in ensuring they do not go extinct. Just this year in Washington the last Native speaker of the Klallam language passed away, again emphasizing that every day we are in a precarious race to healthy languages and communities. Unlike the other world languages spoken in Alaska today, there is no other continent or country these languages belong to.

Passing this bill will send a clear message that these languages, and the peoples and cultures that have grown them for thousands of years right here in Alaska, are intrinsically valued by Alaskans now and into our future. HB 216 is a policy imperative for Alaska; making our languages official is a significant yet simple act, one that works to right the wrongs of the past, enhance healthy, resilient communities, and steps us closer to being a truly great state.

Gunalcheesh, Haw.aa! We thank you for your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Liz Medicine Crow (Haida/Tlingit)

President / CEO