



January 24, 2017

House State Affairs Committee
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB 78 Indigenous Peoples Day

Dear Committee Members,

While we recognize that Christopher Columbus was among the first Europeans to land on the shores of the North American Continent, it is time for Alaska to eliminate Columbus Day and recognize the Indigenous Peoples of Alaska. The rich culture and Indigenous knowledge of Alaska Natives have been of great influence in Alaska and it is time to celebrate and recognize those cultures by establishing the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples Day.

Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI) is a regional Native nonprofit founded in 1980. The institute's mission is to perpetuate and enhance the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultures of Southeast Alaska. Its goal is to promote cultural diversity and cross-cultural understanding. SHI has worked for over three decades to preserve and enhance the culture and language of Native Peoples. We have promoted the integration of culture and language into schools because of the benefits it provides to Native Students. We also believe that these efforts support cultural diversity that make Alaska a richer state.

Governor Walker started the movement toward establishing Indigenous Peoples Day in 2015, and I believe that we should make this change permanent. The past few years we have seen continued support of Alaska Native Heritage with the signing of HB 216 changing the State Language from English to include 20 Alaska Native Languages as official state languages and more initiatives to support Alaska Native education, language and culture.

The contributions by Alaska Natives to the State of Alaska have been significant and it is time we acknowledge and celebrate those contributions. We respectfully urge you to adopt HB 78 establishing the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples Day.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosta Uvel".

Rosita Worl, Ph.D.
President

