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Representative Grier Hopkins, Member

Representative Mike Prax, Member

Representative Mike Cronk, Member

Representative Ronald Gillham, Member

Tsu haa káa keiwa.aa / the daylight broke on us again.

My name is X'unei Lance Twitchell, and I represent only myself this morning. It is an honor to be with you all today, and I hope you all are well.

I am a Professor of Alaska Native Languages at the University of Alaska Southeast, a Council Member of the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council, and have a Ph.D. in Hawaiian and Indigenous Language and Culture Revitalization from Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani, College of Hawaiian Language of the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. This incredible and effective College was established by the Hawai'i State Legislature in 1989, and the center supports and encourages the expansion of the Hawaiian language as a medium of communication in education, business, government and other contexts of social life in the public and private sectors of Hawai'i and beyond.

In 2018, the State of Alaska, the legislature and governor, declared a linguistic emergency based on accelerating states of decline. Since that time, I believe we have collectively failed to take action. No single Alaska Native Language is safe. They are all endangered, and of the 23 known languages more than half of them have ten or fewer known speakers remaining.

### Current State of Alaska Native Languages

Yugtun / Cugtun (Central Alaskan Yup'ik / Cup'ik language)	10,000
Inupiatun (Inupiaq language)	2,500
Yupigestun / Akuzipigestun (St. Lawrence Island Yupik language)	1,000
Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa (Gwich'in language)	250
Unangam Tunuu (Unangǎ Aleut language)	150
Kenaakk'enaage (Koyukon language)	150
Cup'ig (Nunivak Island Cup'ig)	100
Sugt'stun / Alutiit'stun (Sugpiaq / Alutiiq language)	60
Lingít Yoo X'atángi (Tlingit language)	40

Koht'aene Kenaeg'e' / Atnakenaeg'e' (Ahtna language)	25
Dihthaad Xt'een Iin Aandëeg' (Tanacross language)	10
Nee'aanèegn' (Upper Tanana language)	7
Sm'algyax / Shm'algyack (Coast Tsmishian language)	7
Dena'ina Qenaga (Dena'ina language)	5
Denak'i (Upper Kuskokwim language)	5
Xaad Kíl (Haida language)	5
Deg Xinag (Deg Hit'an language)	2
Häl Gołan (Hän language)	2
Benhti Kokhwt'ana Kenaga' (Lower Tanana language)	1
Doogh Qinag (Holikachuk language)	0
Sahcheeg Xut'een Xneege' (Middle Tanana language)	0
Wetał (Tseta'ut language)	0
dAkhunhyuuga' (Eyak language)	0
From the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council Biennial Report to the Governor and Legislature	

As we consider the moves that the legislature can make now, I ask to you think about impacts that are larger than you might think possible. We have effective and proven programs like the Tlingit Culture Language & Literacy program at Harborview Elementary, the Haa Yoo X̣'atángi Kúdi Lingít language nest, the Haa Yoo X̣'atángi Deiyí Language Teacher Pathway, which are all in Juneau, and X̣ántsii Náay Haida Language Preschool in Hydaburg. These programs produce competent bilingual readers and speakers. You have likely heard about these programs, and hopefully have also heard about the effectiveness of the 'Aha Pūnana Leo Hawaiian language nest and Nāwahī Hawaiian language medium school.

Our languages need more. Saying that it is a crisis that they are dying, and then failing to develop substantive legislation, means you are unfortunately aware of what was going to happen if you did nothing. I do not want history to remember us for what we allowed to die, what we failed to protect from targeted oppression. I want us to be remembered for making the bold move, for being inclusive and seeing that Alaska Native languages deserve a seat at the table of public education. That seat is not one that students can choose to sit in if they want. It should be something that we all do together.

If we are all Alaskans, should we not stand together to make changes that can create more life? If we are Alaskans together in this great state, can we not do something more than waiting for entire ways of life to be destroyed?

Every one of you has exponentially more power than I do, so I will ask you to make the bold move. I will beg you to do something. For an act like the Alaska Reads Act to include Alaska Native languages is a great step. But if someone has been attacked and nearly killed, it is not humane to simply let them into a building. You have to help and you have to change.

Education has bloody hands when it comes to Alaska Native languages. Alaskan teachers wrote books about stuffing chemical-soaked rags into the mouths of children for speaking their own languages. We have elders who have stood up—and are still standing up—to share their horrifying stories about the torture they endured at the hands of Alaskan education.

I share this with you because I want you think about something very important: if education was the vehicle used to destroy Alaska Native languages, can we not, as competent and caring human beings, make education into something that we have never seen before in this state?

Every Alaskan has a responsibility for what happens with Alaska Native languages. There is no way around that. Alaska Natives have been here. We are here. We will always be here. No one ever had the right to prohibit our languages, but they did. No one ever had the right to abuse a child for being themselves, but they did.

What I am asking for is more than inclusion, more than culturally responsive education. I am talking about shifting education to give Alaska Natives a home on our ancestral lands. I support the inclusion written in this bill, and I support early literacy and increased support for teachers and students.

Even more, I support inclusion at a substantive level. Every student in Alaska should take one semester of an Alaska Native language in order to graduate. If that is not the case, then we must be saying that these languages are unimportant.

Teacher and advocates of Alaska Native languages are tired. We are on the verge of failing despite giving it everything we have. Would you not do something if you have the power?

We need a pathway for fully licensed and certified Alaska Native language teachers. We need a statewide Alaska Native Language Schools Consortium. Last weekend we lost one of the 11 remaining master level birth speakers of our Lingít language. The tragedy is I could not find a way to show her before she left that we were guaranteeing a future for our language. I cannot do that because I feel alone in this work. My words have echoed off the walls of these meeting rooms and chambers, and then have drifted off into space. And not only mine, but so many elders and language warriors before me.

I can outline the plan. I can collaborate with Hawaiian language leaders, Māori language leaders, Mohawk language leaders, Anishinaabe language leaders, and all the folks I can find who are doing the work. But you all sit in the big chairs.

Small steps will not get us out of this situation, but if you can resist the urge to keep things as they are, if you can find the courage to hold our hands until we are safe, then I will remember you forever and will be forever grateful that you saw us, heard us, and created the change towards equity that was long overdue.

Gunalchéesh. Háw'aa. Nt'oyaxsn.