

February 25, 2021

Members of the House Resources Committee

State Capital

Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Support of House Bill No. 122: An Act Relating to Protection of Funtner Bay Unangax Cemetery

Dear Honorable Members of the House Resources Committee:

On behalf of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island (ACSPI), a federally recognized Alaska Native tribe located in the Pribilof Islands, Bering Sea, Alaska, representing the tribal members of St. Paul Island, Alaska, we strongly support House Bill No. 122, *"An Act relating to the Funtner Bay marine park unit of the state park system; relating to protection of the social and historical significance of the Unangax cemetery located in Funtner Bay and providing for the amendment of the management plan for the Funtner Bay marine park unit."*

Our mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents, great grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives were taken from St. Paul and St. George Islands in June 1942 when the U.S.S. Delaroff arrived unannounced and U.S.C.G. rushed our families onto the ship with little time to grab only belongings that would fit in one bag and a blanket. At this time, our people were "wards of the U.S. government," living in servitude to harvest laaquadan (northern fur seal) furs for the benefit of the national treasury. The fur industry funded the purchase of Alaska from the Russian American Company, and the federal government continued to view Unangan as property after purchasing the state of Alaska. The acts that took place during WWII, including removal of our people from our islands and internment at Funtner Bay, are deplorable. The forced removal of Unangan from our region by the U.S. military and the placing of about 850 people in abandoned cannery buildings without basic utilities and dilapidated facilities where about 10% of the people died in what has been appropriately termed wrongful deaths is an important part of Unangan history. The relatives we lost to disease, starvation, and cold at Funtner Bay are interred in the cemetery there. This time in our history was despairing, yet an important piece of our history—a unique history belonging to the Pribilof Islands Tribal members. It is also a critical piece of history to the State of Alaska and our Nation.

As the families and descendants of Unangan interned at Funtner Bay, we ask the House and Senate of the 32nd Alaska Legislature to pass House Bill No. 122 to forever protect the gravesite of Unangan at Funtner Bay, as they sacrificed their lives and homes for the war on behalf of the federal government. This bill will strengthen and preserve our Unangan cultural heritage. Thus, we appreciate Representative Sara Hannan proposing this bill, we appreciate the members of the House Resources Committee considering the bill, and we strongly support the approval of House Bill No. 122 to protect the Funtner Bay Unangan cemetery.

Sincerely,



Amos T. Philemonoff, Sr.

President, Aleut Community of St. Paul Island