

Gunalchéesh (thank you). My name is X'unei Lance Twitchell. I chair the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council. I am a Professor of Alaska Native Languages at the University of Alaska Southeast, but I represent only myself here today. I appreciate this time.

Alaska is home to 23 known Indigenous languages, and according to recent research by the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council (ANLPAC) none of them are safe. Since 2014 these have been official languages of Alaska, and this bill is supportive of language revitalization and reclamation work.

Preservation is a term that is important to the work that we do, but it only involves documenting the language so we can hold onto the knowledge and ability of current speakers. Revitalization is also what we do, which involves two things: 1) protecting the speakers we have while creating new ones, and 2) ensuring that our languages are languages of power and use. Reclamation is also what we do, which is making sure that our languages are used in a wide variety of social and physical spaces.

Our languages were actively banished by educators, political leaders, religious leaders, and the general public. Because of the active suppression and genocide of our languages, we face an unnecessary and often silent death march. I encourage this panel to support this bill so we the council can have a name more fitting for the diverse range of work that we are doing.

We also need additional representation on our council. 23 languages requires more than five voting members. I would also recommend revising the official list of languages—which I believe is in statute 44.12.310—to include three languages that were unintentionally omitted when we made them co-official languages of Alaska.

I do have a list for the committee, which includes the names of the languages in how they would spell them in the languages and then how we would spell them for the general public. I would ask that this be considered. It also shows by our estimates the current numbers of speakers and level of endangerment, going from blue to red, with red being what we call dormant. We don't like the word "extinct" because they could come back. We have seen Indigenous languages come from zero speakers to now having speakers and building language programs.

I would also mention: I want to make sure that Indigenous languages are a high priority for the state of Alaska. A state of emergency was declared several years ago by the governor and the legislature, and I don't know if significant action has been taken since that time. So with the time that we have here today, I would highly recommend that this body carefully read the priorities that are given every two years by the council, which do include potentially standardizing Indigenous languages in Alaska public education and also creating official pathways for Alaska Native language teacher certification. I would also add that all teachers in Alaska should have knowledge of Alaska Native languages if they're going to teach in Alaska, in particular in public schools.

I am very thankful for the opportunity to visit with you folks today. When the Council was established, one of the first moves before the Council did anything was that the budget was cut in half. That is a problem when we say these things are a priority, but then they say you can have two staff members, but actually take care of all the languages of Alaska with a single staff member.

To answer the question that was previously posed: if you look at the map of Alaska Native languages, right in the center is I believe where we're missing most of our representation. So our Dene languages, our interior languages, are not well represented on the council. We do have council members who are ethnically related to these many of these languages, but we need folks who are actively working in the languages. What we would consider a language expert, it does not have to do with whether you are certified teacher. It has to do with whether or not you are actively teaching and documenting the language, and are doing work in language advocacy statewide.

Gunálchéesh.

Testimony in support of House Bill No. 26

Invited Testimony: Bernadette Y. Alvanna-Stimpfle, ANLPAC, Vice Chair

March 8, 2023

An Act renaming the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council as the Council for "Alaska Native Languages: and relating to the Council for Alaska Languages."

Council for Alaska Native Languages: What does it mean?

Section 1:

1) Preservation

- A. Archives: this means working in archives where Native languages were recorded from years past. There are large and small archival repositories where new generations can be supported to acquire and learn their respective languages.
- B. Media: There are resources online in the internet for learners and researchers to find information to develop learning materials. Indigenous people share what they have learned what works for their communities and learning institutions.
- C. Community Wellness: Indigenous people work towards wellness for adults to learn what was lost from their past treatments of knowing how to speak to home language at schools and churches. This caused Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder for the next generations. To break this trauma, Indigenous have worked hard on cultural wellness in arts and ceremonies to revitalize what was lost.

2) Restoration

- A. Reclaim in restoring our Native languages, we are reclaiming who we are and where we come from. We have come from thousands of years of not only surviving harsh environments but also, thriving in that very environment. Our languages comes from our land, sea, and resources in the air.
- B. Rebirth and Renaissance: This is the time (today, now) for revival of all of our Alaska Native languages. The language council works towards to this, where our languages are normalized in the whole State.

3) Revitalization

- A. Build on Native Identity: When a young person learns in the language, they are forming an Indigenous identity. (Note, not learning the language).
- B. Moving Forward: The ultimate result is for cultural wellness and being able to speak from the Native perspective any study.

Section 2:

- 4) Seven Voting Members** – Alaska needs to hear from a wider community of Alaska Native language experts and the advocates of language warriors. This makes for a stronger network of language work with the same perspective of revitalizing Indigenous languages in Alaska.