

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
February 28, 2012
1:36 p.m.

1:36:57 PM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Stoltze called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 1:36 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Bill Stoltze, Co-Chair
Representative Bill Thomas Jr., Co-Chair
Representative Anna Fairclough, Vice-Chair
Representative Mia Costello
Representative Mike Doogan
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Representative Les Gara
Representative David Guttenberg
Representative Reggie Joule
Representative Mark Neuman
Representative Tammie Wilson

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Representative Craig Johnson; Erin Shine, Staff,
Representative Craig Johnson; Representative Alan Dick;
Genevieve Cook, teacher aid; Selina Eberson, Tlingit Elder,
Harbor View Elementary; Alice Haldane, Hoonah, Alaska;
Beverly Faye Hugo, Cultural Teacher, Barrow Alaska; Marsh
Hotch, Tlingit speaker; Roby Littlefield, Tlingit teacher,
Sitka School District; Chrisann Justice, Inupiaq Education
Department, North Slope School District; Edward Hotch,
parent; Paul Marks, Goldbelt Corporation, Juneau; Nancy
Douglas, Sitka; Mark Hans Chester, Second Grade teacher,
JSD Sealaska Heritage; Representative Cathy Munoz

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Tom Westcott, President, Alaska Professional Firefighters; Gorden Descuther, Executive Director, Alaska Fire Standards Council; Jeff Tucker, Alaska State Fire Chiefs Association; Annette Evans Smith, President & CEO, Alaska Native Heritage Center; Denise Morris, President, First Alaska Institute; Patrick Anderson, Executive Director, Chugachmiut; Byron Charles, Ketchikan; Jerry Ahwinona, Nome, Alaska, District Chairman Republican Party

SUMMARY

HB 254 ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGE COUNCIL

HB 254 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 304 ALASKA FIRE STANDARDS COUNCIL

HB 304 was REPORTED out of committee with a "do pass" recommendation and with previously published fiscal note: FN1 (DPS).

#hb304

HOUSE BILL 304

"An Act relating to the membership of the Alaska Fire Standards Council."

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Co-Chair Stoltze disclosed that there may be some possible changes to HB 254, therefore it would probably not leave the committee today.

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REPRESENTATIVE CRAIG JOHNSON, commented that he had introduced the bill at the request of fire departments throughout the state.

ERIN SHINE, STAFF, REPRESENTATIVE CRAIG JOHNSON, explained that the bill makes reasonable changes to the Alaska Fire Standards Council. The first change designates an existing seat to a member of the Alaska Professional Firefighters Association. The second change adds a seat for the Alaska Fire Chiefs Association, and the third, reclassifies the existing seat from a Firefighter Administrative Officer to

a member of the Alaska State Firefighters Association. The mission of the Alaska Fire Standards Council is to establish professional standards for fire service personnel and curriculum requirements for the certification of the training program. Under HB 304, the governor appoints one member from each of the three associations to the Alaska Fire Standards Council from a list of a least three nominees submitted by each association. The intent of HB 304 is to ensure that all three associations are represented on the Alaska Fire Standards Council and that the members can speak with the full confidence of their respective associations in council meetings.

Representative Doogan questioned what happens when all twelve members show up and want to vote.

Ms. Shine said that currently the board consists of eleven members, but will become a twelve member board under the bill. In the event that all twelve voting members are there, the Chair will abstain from voting.

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TOM WESTCOTT, PRESIDENT, ALASKA PROFESSIONAL FIREFIGHTERS (via teleconference), voiced his support for the bill. He disclosed that the Standards Council gave their support for this legislation. The main goal is for it to be another tool to assist the Standards Council in doing their job.

Representative Guttenberg questioned Mr. Westcott on why the legislation was needed, what was the problem and how can it be fixed. Mr. Westcott answered that the bill designates a seat for the Alaska Professional Firefighters on the Alaska Fire Standards Council and insures there will always be a representative on the board. The intent is for the position to be a valuable addition.

GORDEN DESCUTHER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALASKA FIRE STANDARDS COUNCIL (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. The agreement is that both positions would augment the council's ability to perform its mission.

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JEFF TUCKER, ALASKA STATE FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION (via teleconference), supported the bill. The addition of the

positions puts the three major state firefighting associations on the standards council.

Co-Chair Stoltze CLOSED public testimony. He referred to the fiscal note. He believed the funds were covering travel expenses for the additional person.

Co-Chair Stoltze indicated he had worked to get the funding for the bill. He expressed that it was important to have standards for training, whether for volunteers or paid positions.

Vice-chair Fairclough MOVED to report HB 304 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal note. There being, NO OBJECTION, it was so ordered.

HB 304 was REPORTED out of committee with a "do pass" recommendation and with previously published fiscal note: FN1 (DPS).

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AT EASE

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RECONVENED

#hb254

HOUSE BILL 254

"An Act establishing the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council and relating to the preservation, restoration, and revitalization of Alaska Native languages."

[1:50:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALAN DICK, spoke of the need for HB 254. He signified that he and his wife Helen had administered, for three years, an endangered language grant for the Alaska Native Heritage Center. The program consisted of creating language lessons, video language lessons, and an Athabaskan lexicon. For decades the native people of Alaska have indicated what is needed to provide for the healthiest community and the people have emphasized that learning their language is a fundamental foundation for this improvement. He informed that built within each native

language are connections that cannot be easily translated or understood in English. He contended that the reason for teaching the native language outside of the home is to get better at it in the same way that English is taught in the schools. He reiterated the past history of the native people of Alaska when they were forbidden to speak their language. He opined that validation from the state and the school system is needed in preserving native languages. He spoke of the variety of languages and groups. Representative Dick pointed out the five main different cultural areas in Alaska. The bill asks for a council to discuss the modern day issues that have to do with language restoration. Ten years from now the conversation will not be possible because the native speaking elders are passing away. He complimented the documentation of the languages by the University of Alaska Fairbanks by brilliant linguists, but the bill concerns itself more with the restoration and revitalization of the languages. Representative Dick favored the three year sunset. He also spoke of the council being able to take advantage of new technology and software to revitalize languages.

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Representative Dick expressed his hope that the council will provide wisdom and a concrete product to guide in later decision making and that the legislative body will acknowledge the importance of the bill.

Co-Chair Thomas opined that, although he is enthusiastic about the concept, he did not believe anything was gained leaving it with the Department of Education. He remarked that it could really work with a native organization already providing the information. He believed the program would be bound for failure if it is in Department of Education. He continued that under the bill, the people in charge would not be Alaska Native speakers. He suggested the program be turned over to First Alaskans with a possible tax credit to help fund it. His concern is putting on another state employee who would not get anywhere with the program. He suggested that possibly an oil company could help fund the project.

Representative Dick indicated that he welcomed any friendly amendment.

Co-Chair Thomas signified that the right people in charge could do a better job.

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Representative Edgmon agreed with many of the comments. He directed a question to Co-Chair Thomas and asked if his idea was for the bill to go forward as it is, but with a different funding source.

Co-Chair Thomas indicated that changes could be made with the sponsor. He argued that the goal is to preserve Alaska Native languages and put it into the hands of people who already know how to speak them. First Alaskans is set up to be an educational arm of the Alaska Native people.

Representative Edgmon disclosed his need to get a better understanding of the bill. He believed both Co-Chair Thomas's idea and the bill had merit. Co-Chair Stoltze agreed on the fiscal concerns and how it is funded.

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Representative Gara expressed that he liked the concept, but in relation to the fiscal note, he was worried about many good people doing a lot of work that ends up getting disregarded. The way the bill is written, people will work on the recommendations, and then nothing has to happen. It is almost like a task force. He commented that it should not take experts long to come up with a language preservation policy. He suggested that after the program is complete, a "Shall" should be added to implement a plan or a program. He pointed out the bill now lacks the "Shall" portion which is necessary to make sure something happens.

Represent Dick appreciated Representative Gara's insight.

Representative Joule spoke that he would like to revisit the issue of a person from the Bush Caucus being appointed to the council. As a legislator he has tried to be a bridge from rural to urban Alaska. He suggested that someone from the legislature who has an interest in the issue or someone who questions the issue should be involved. He signified the need for a broader base of support of people who have an interest or could be engaged to give a broader perspective.

Co-Chair Stoltze agreed.

Vice-chair Fairclough stated that she liked Representative Joule's comments and agreed with the importance of reaching out to those in the legislature who may not be supportive. If those individuals could be reached, it could create a momentum for the project. She declared that passionate people involved in an issue can make a difference. If Representative Dick wants the state do something, champions will be needed from both legislative bodies to make it happen.

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ANNETTE EVANS SMITH, PRESIDENT & CEO, ALASKA NATIVE HERITAGE CENTER (via teleconference), spoke in her native language. She communicated that many believe the DNA of a culture lives within the languages. The loss of a language brings about the loss of vast amounts of traditional knowledge. The indigenous languages of Alaska make the state unique and offer a glimpse into thousands of years of history. It is critical to take proactive measures now to strengthen languages while language speakers in each of the Alaskan cultural groups still exist. Evidence exists that indigenous children with strong linguistic and cultural background are more academically successful. Languages provide a strong cultural identity and strong sense of self. The Alaska Native Heritage Center's award winning programs have seen successes many times. Language learning produces a stronger cultural identity and self-esteem. She emphasized that because government has played such a powerful role in the decline of native languages, it is reasonable to expect they can play a role in restoring those languages. She thanked Representative Dick and Representative Munoz for sponsoring the bill.

Vice-chair Fairclough noted that in reviewing the Alaska Native Heritage Center's mission, it has been suggested that the First Alaskans might be a better place for this conversation. Ms. Smith agreed with the intent of the bill and agreed support for the panel would live well within the Alaskan Native Heritage Center and their mission.

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DENISE MORRIS, PRESIDENT, FIRST ALASKA INSTITUTE (via teleconference), supported the bill. She extended a thank-

you to the sponsors and co-sponsors of the bill. First Alaskans Institute is state-wide non-profit Native organization for advancing and shaping decisions that affect their lives. Revitalization of native language learning is important for the restoration for the health and well-being of communities of Alaska. All languages have a home and Alaska is the home of many indigenous native languages. The language exists nowhere else in the world. She expressed that there had been some discussion on the make-up of the panel and the importance of having Alaska native speakers on it. She also emphasized that there are entire generations of Alaskans who do not know their native language, but are critically involved in teaching and advancing Alaska Native language revitalization.

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PATRICK ANDERSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CHUGACHMIUT (via teleconference), supported the bill. He explained that his consortium consisted of seven tribes from Prince William Sound and the lower Cook Inlet regions. He believed it is a race against time to preserve and restore his areas major language, Sugcestun. The native village of Eyak lost their race to preserve and restore their language when its last native speaker passed away in 2008. In 2008 there were forty eight fluent Sugcestun speakers in the region, today there are only thirty five. Some adults can use the language, but are not fluent. He spoke of the young people in the 1950s sent to mission schools and literally had their language beaten out of them. As a result he did not live with native parents who were able to speak their native languages. He stressed that there is a very short time to restore the language. He reported that in his region there are three fluent speaking teachers certified by the state of Alaska. The school districts of Alaska do not see the importance of teaching native languages in the school; therefore the teachers are only working outside the schools. He agreed with the question of resources and found that funding has always been tight. He appreciated Representative Dick's efforts to support the language council. There needs to be advocates for the bill in the legislature and the administration.

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BYRON CHARLES, KETCHIKAN (via teleconference), introduced himself in the Tlingit language. He commented that the dialects of the Tlingit people are different throughout Southeast Alaska. He spoke of the importance for young people being able to speak and understand it. The elders are often sad because they know the young try, but find it difficult. It is much easier to teach a language at a younger age. He supported the bill and agreed that the best resources are the elderly people still alive today.

Co-Chair Stoltze acknowledged Co-Sponsor Representative Cathy Munoz in the room.

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GENEVIEVE COOK, TEACHER AID, spoke in her native language and testified in support of the bill.

SELINA EBERSON, TLINGIT ELDER, HARBOR VIEW ELEMENTARY, voiced her support of the bill. She noted that she is a fluent speaker of her Tlingit language. When she was young she was forbidden speak, dance or sing. She asserted that the native people have been hurt and all they are asking for is some help from the state to carry language, dance and song back so children can know who they are. The bill means very much to her. The Alaska Native Sisterhood and Brotherhood donated when they could to help with the preservation and educating the children. She wanted to see the native languages alive 100 years from today.

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ALICE HALDANE, HOONAH, ALASKA, supported the bill. She pointed out that she works in Glacier Bay as a cultural intern and is often asked why the native languages were taken away from them. She stated she wants to see it all come back so the people can have their pride back.

BEVERLY FAYE HUGO, CULTURAL TEACHER, BARROW ALASKA, encouraged support for the bill. She spoke in her native language. She indicated that her group had been invited by the Tlingit and Haida to provide tools to help them build up their language program. She felt fortunate to have been grounded in her language by the time she left home. She expressed that it has been hard to maintain her cultural identity. She informed that some professors at the university were clueless about her cultural heritage and

language and declared that no one has the right to ask others to lose their culture and language. Native people should not have to give up their identity or personhood. She believed the legislature had a responsibility to serve the people.

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Representative Wilson thanked Ms. Hugo for her teaching.

Representative Joule stated that he had the privilege of visiting Ms. Hugo's class in Barrow and was amazed at her achievements.

MARSH HOTCH, TLINGIT SPEAKER, voiced her support for the bill. She began in her native language and revealed she teaches her language. She thanked the sponsors of the bill. Ms. Hotch learned her language while being raised by her grandparents, but related that when she went to school her parents were told they could only speak English in the home. Her parents wanted the best for their daughter, but her parents did not speak English very well and the house became silent. Her grandmother wondered what would happen to her granddaughter's grandchildren when they did not know who they were. She stressed the importance of young people learning their language and related a story of one young man and the difference in his behavior and demeanor when speaking his language and knowing his culture. She wants the language preserved and placed inside the soul of the young.

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Co-Chair Stoltze handed the gavel to Co-Chair Thomas.

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ROBY LITTLEFIELD, TLINGIT TEACHER, SITKA SCHOOL DISTRICT, testified first in the Tlingit language. She learned Tlingit from her father-in-law after her marriage. Sealaska Heritage has provided teaching classes for fluent speakers and their apprentices. She expressed strong feelings about what needs to be done to keep native languages alive. She pointed out that documenting and preserving the language is not enough to keep it alive. She talked of the need for cultural and academic language standards. Cultural awareness is for all people in Alaska, not just the Alaska

Native, but she acknowledged it is hard to do without support. The Alaska Native Heritage Curriculum needs to be taught in the schools and valued in the state. It helps to make the state special. She reminded that time is short as native language speaking elders are rapidly passing away.

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CHRISANN JUSTICE, INUPIAQ EDUCATION DEPARTMENT, North Slope SCHOOL DISTRICT, supported the bill. She indicated that she works with the Inupiaq teachers to develop materials that are used in their classes to teach the language. She divulged and that she was raised bi-lingual, bi-cultural, not in Alaska, and that experience helps her understand the importance of languages in helping people identify themselves. She declared how shocked she is when meeting educated people who do not understand the importance of the revitalization of native languages.

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EDWARD HOTCH, PARENT, supported the bill. He acknowledged the bill is not a cure-all, but does provide a foot hold. After years of being told they could not speak their native language in school, the move will allow it come back. Elders are being lost daily; there has been a loss of half the Tlingit speakers over the past year. He discussed a previous big push to have English-only in public schools, but it is important for children to learn where they come from and to know their own language. He discussed Elizabeth Peratrovich Day and related a story regarding a teacher who said celebrating that day was a waste of her time and tore up the news flyer announcing the day. He explained that everything Elizabeth Peratrovich had fought for was torn away by the teacher's words. The bill is not a cure-all, but would provide Alaska Natives with a step forward. He believed it was important to understand that the bill would not just help Alaska Natives, but would also help Alaska as a state. He worked with Goldbelt Heritage to get the native languages taught in the schools, but the message was sent that native language teaching was neither worth the time or effort. He thanked the committee for its support.

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Co-Chair Thomas related a personal story about his name.

PAUL MARKS, GOLDBELT CORPORATION, JUNEAU, thanked the committee and spoke in Tlingit. He told a personal story about growing up with Tlingit spoken in the home. When he started school, he became confused by the western foreign-thinking system. He thinks in Tlingit. Most of the people he named in his story were no longer living. His older sister published a book that told a story about their lives as children. His sister was hidden in the bow of the family boat when she was little to prevent the federal marshals from taking her away to learn the English language. The bill would help the Alaska Native regain their dignity and it would be a big feather in the hats of the committee members to help Alaska Natives with its support.

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Mr. Marks continued to discuss the merits of learning and understanding the Tlingit language. He restated that the bill would help Natives regain their dignity and help their children be proud. He stressed that Alaska Natives needed their language back and urged the support of the committee.

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NANCY DOUGLAS, SITKA, grew up with a Tlingit mother who spoke the language. She stated that she has created opportunities to learn the language working with elders in Sitka and told stories of her experiences to learn. She had an opportunity to be a student learning to be a teacher. She was asked to create a program to teach the Alaska Native culture and language in the Juneau school district. The elders want the voices of their ancestors to be heard across the land.

Representative Gara talked about the English-only law. When he first arrived in Alaska, he felt the need to respect those who were here thousands of years before him so when the English-only law passed, he worked with the Native American Rights Fund to challenge that law. Part of law said that the native language could not be spoken during traditional village meetings. That was offensive to him. A bill like HB 254 cannot make up for what has happened in the past, but it helps to turn the curve and gain ground from what has been lost in the past.

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Co-Chair Thomas commented on a personal story.

JERRY AHWINONA, NOME, ALASKA, DISTRICT CHAIRMAN REPUBLICAN PARTY (via teleconference), supported the bill. He commented that he was raised speaking his native language, but in elementary school he was forced to learn English. He studied the encyclopedia to learn the English language forgetting most of his own culture and language. He learned what words meant in English.

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MARK HANS CHESTER, SECOND GRADE TEACHER, JSD SEALASKA HERITAGE, grew up learning English. He did not start studying Tlingit until he went to college. He expressed the importance of the bill in the eyes of the elders. It is just as important for his generation and those generations to come. The bill might allow native speakers throughout the state to collaborate together. Each language is very different from the other and new ideas might be inspired from each other. There were four to five hundred native speakers when he started to learn the language, now sixteen years later, there are less than one hundred. He believed that anything the state can do to put back what was taken away will help.

Co-Chair Stoltze talked about the native village of Eukultna in his district and the industrial school that once was there. He declared how pleased he was to have the opportunity to help rectify the past and step in the right direction.

Representative Joule interjected that the word to use is "healing."

Co-Chair Stoltze thanked all that participated.

HB 254 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

ADJOURNMENT

[3:29:13 PM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 3:29 PM.