CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 3(CRA)

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY THE HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Offered: 3/11/15
Referred: Judiciary

Sponsor(s): REPRESENTATIVES EDGMON, Kreiss-Tomkins, Kito, Tuck

A RESOLUTION

Urging members of the Alaska delegation to the United States Congress to introduce substantially similar legislation to the Alaska Safe Families and Villages Act of 2013.

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

WHEREAS the 229 federally recognized tribes in the state represent a vast continuum of cultural legacies enriched by thousands of years of traditions and place-based ways of life; and

WHEREAS many Alaska tribal communities face severe problems relating to poverty, lack of economic opportunity, alcoholism, drug abuse, domestic violence, and sexual assault; and

WHEREAS the percentage of Alaska Natives living below the federal poverty guideline is nearly twice the national average; and

WHEREAS the unemployment rate for Alaska Natives is dramatically higher than the national average; and

WHEREAS the alcohol-related death rate for Alaska Natives has, in recent years, been more than 16 times higher than the alcohol-related death rate for Caucasians; and

WHEREAS rural communities in the state have, in recent years, reported alarming

opioid, heroin, and methamphetamine abuse; and

WHEREAS Alaska Native women in rural communities have reported rates of domestic violence multiple times higher than the national average; and

WHEREAS Alaska Native women suffer the highest rate of sexual assault of any population in the United States, and the rate of sexual assault for Alaska Native children is six times the national average; and

WHEREAS, while Alaska Natives represent 19 percent of the population of the state, they make up 36 percent of Alaskans in prisons or jails; and

WHEREAS, in the past 25 years, state, federal, and joint commissions, task forces, and committees established to address those issues have included the Alaska Natives Commission, created in 1990; the Alaska Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Fairness and Access, created in 1995; the Alaska Commission on Rural Governance and Empowerment, created in 1998; the Alaska Rural Justice and Law Enforcement Commission, created in 2004; the Indian Law and Order Commission, created in 2010; and the United States Attorney General's Advisory Committee on American Indian and Alaska Native Children Exposed to Violence, created in 2013; and

WHEREAS each of those bodies concluded that the current law enforcement and justice systems alone have been unable to address and reduce crime, social ills, and community distress adequately in rural Alaska; and

WHEREAS each of those bodies identified the need to strengthen the authority, responsibility, and capacity of local tribal governments to administer public safety and justice in their communities; and

WHEREAS many experts agree that greater control, better defined jurisdiction, and increased accountability at the local level will lead to swifter response to violence and criminal activity in communities, increased crime prevention, and increased rehabilitative, rather than punitive, sentencing models; and

WHEREAS, in matters of jurisdiction and the delivery of justice at the local level, having the state and Alaska Native tribes work together in an improved relationship will benefit communities throughout Alaska; and

WHEREAS ambiguities in federal laws deprive Alaska tribes of jurisdictional tools to make their communities safer and healthier; and

WHEREAS the original version of the Alaska Safe Families and Villages Act of 2013, which failed to pass the 113th United States Congress, included provisions to establish a demonstration project under which a number of Alaska Native tribes would possess enhanced authority over domestic violence and child abuse and neglect, greater local law enforcement responsibilities to combat alcohol and drug abuse, increased federal funding for development of their tribal courts and local law enforcement needs, and improved coordination and communication among federal, state, tribal, and local law enforcement agencies;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature urges the members of the Alaska delegation in the United States Congress to introduce legislation substantially similar to the original Alaska Safe Families and Villages Act of 2013, reported to the Senate in the First Regular Session of the 113th United States Congress.

COPIES of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Barack Obama, President of the United States; the Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr., Vice-President of the United States and President of the U.S. Senate; the Honorable John Boehner, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; the Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Majority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives; the Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives; the Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader of the U.S. Senate; the Honorable Harry Reid, Minority Leader of the U.S. Senate; and the Honorable Lisa Murkowski and the Honorable Dan Sullivan, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative, members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.