

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

May 9, 2019

3:29 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Click Bishop, Chair
Senator Chris Birch, Vice Chair
Senator Mia Costello
Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 126

"An Act establishing November as Alaska Native Heritage Month."

- MOVED HB 126 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 126

SHORT TITLE: ALASKA NATIVE HERITAGE MONTH

SPONSOR(S): TRIBAL AFFAIRS

| | | |
|----------|-----|--|
| 04/08/19 | (H) | READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS |
| 04/08/19 | (H) | TRB |
| 04/09/19 | (H) | TRB AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106 |
| 04/09/19 | (H) | Heard & Held |
| 04/09/19 | (H) | MINUTE(TRB) |
| 04/16/19 | (H) | TRB AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106 |
| 04/16/19 | (H) | Moved HB 126 Out of Committee |
| 04/16/19 | (H) | MINUTE(TRB) |
| 04/17/19 | (H) | TRB RPT 7DP |
| 04/17/19 | (H) | DP: VANCE, ORTIZ, EDGMON, TALERICO, KOPP, LINCOLN, ZULKOSKY |
| 05/07/19 | (H) | TRANSMITTED TO (S) |
| 05/07/19 | (H) | VERSION: HB 126 |
| 05/08/19 | (S) | READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS |
| 05/08/19 | (S) | CRA |

05/09/19

(S)

CRA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE TIFFANY ZULKOSKY

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 126, provided an overview of the bill.

ELIZABETH MEDICINE CROW, President

First Alaskans Institute

Take, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 126.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:29:14 PM](#)

CHAIR CLICK BISHOP called the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:29 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Gray-Jackson, Hoffman, Costello, Birch, and Chair Bishop.

HB 126-ALASKA NATIVE HERITAGE MONTH

[3:29:51 PM](#)

CHAIR BISHOP announced the consideration of House Bill 126 (HB 126). He noted that the House Tribal Affairs Committee sponsored the bill.

[3:31:07 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TIFFANY ZULKOSKY, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor and chair of the House Tribal Affairs Committee, thanked Senator Gray-Jackson for introducing Senate Bill 86 (SB 86), a bill that also looks to permanently establish Alaska Native Heritage Month.

She explained that HB 126 is the first bill sponsored by Alaska's first ever House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs. HB 126 passed unanimously out of committee and nearly unanimously on the House Floor. The bill seeks to permanently establish November as Alaska Native Heritage Month.

She explained that Alaska is home to 229 federally recognized tribes that comprises nearly half of all tribes in the country.

Alaska Native people consist of at least 20-distinct-cultural groups and native languages, 13-regional-native corporations, almost 200 village corporations, and 12-regional-tribal-nonprofit consortiums.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY said permanently establishing Alaska Native Heritage Month provides an opportunity to celebrate, honor, and recognize the rich, vibrant cultures of Alaska's natives across the state. HB 126 is legislative recognition that Alaska Natives have made on the federal level for decades.

She said since the 1970s, Congress has passed numerous joint resolutions and proclamations recognizing the contributions of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the country. In 2013, President Obama proclaimed November as National Native American Heritage Month. In 2017, President Trump also proclaimed November as National Native American Heritage Month stating, "American Indians and Alaska Natives are inextricably linked with the history of the United States. Native Americans' contributions are woven deeply into our nation's rich tapestry." She posed that President Trump's statement could also be said about Alaska's native people and the state.

She said Alaska Native people have occupied its land for thousands of years and have a unique history that all Alaskans know and love. The recognition from HB 126 helps Alaskans move on from the complex historic divisions in the state. Alaska Native's unique heritage and shared cultural appreciation strengthens relationships that bring all Alaskans together. Alaska native people, cultures, languages, and traditions significantly contribute to the state's history, economy, and diverse identity.

She summarized that HB 126 serves to formally acknowledge the many contributions, sacrifices, and resiliency of Alaska Native people that every community, culture, and resident in the state can celebrate.

[3:33:45 PM](#)

CHAIR BISHOP opened public testimony.

[3:34:01 PM](#)

At ease.

[3:34:31 PM](#)

CHAIR BISHOP called the committee back to order.

[3:34:49 PM](#)

ELIZABETH MEDICINE CROW, President, First Alaskans Institute, Kake, Alaska, testified in support of HB 126. She explained that the First Alaskans Institute is a statewide Alaska native nonprofit organization that works towards progress for the next ten-thousand years. The First Alaskans Institute focuses on amplifying the voice of Alaska Native people, ensuring that their ways of life are advancing via decision makers that address issues that impact Alaska Native people.

She set forth that the Alaska Native community have been stewarding Alaska as their homeland for over ten-thousand years and the native community looks forward to the next ten-thousand years. HB 126 is an important bill, not just for Alaska natives but for all Alaskans because the legislation helps to make permanent a month to celebrate the diverse cultures of Alaska Native people across the state, the contributions made by Alaska Native people for thousands of years, and the ability for all Alaskans to enjoy the beauty, strength, and connection of what it means to be an Alaskan, noting that Alaska Native's ancestors took great care in stewarding Alaska's lands and waters.

She specified that HB 126 provides an opportunity to make Alaska Heritage Month permanent during the month of November. The bill's permanent designation in November allows the legislature to recognize the critical and important contributions of Alaska Native people. November is an important time in Alaska Native's calendar year because the month is a time of celebration for the many native cultures after the spring, summer, and fall harvest seasons. Schools will also be able to plan events that celebrates the positive stories of Alaska Native people, a critical inclusion for the wellbeing of Alaska Native children.

She summarized that the First Alaskans Institute stands as a statewide nonprofit organization in support of HB 126. She added that she also stands as a native woman, as a citizen of her tribe, the organized Village of Kake, and as a citizen of Alaska for making sure that Alaskans take moments to celebrate the good things that are happening, and HB 126 will allow that to happen.

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CHAIR BISHOP closed public testimony.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON thanked Representative Zulkosky for bringing HB 126 forward, a bill that is important. She explained that HB 126 is important to her because while she was serving on the Anchorage Assembly for nine years, she brought forward

resolutions that recognized Alaska's many diverse cultures. She said that now that she is in the Alaska Senate, one of her goals was bring forward bills recognizing the state's many diverse cultures that can be in state statutes forever. She detailed that her first goal was to bring forward bills recognizing Black History Month as well as Alaska Native Heritage Month. She said she is thrilled that the bill for Black History Month is ready for the governor's signature and is grateful that legislation for Alaska Native Heritage Month is advancing.

SENATOR COSTELLO thanked the sponsors of SB 86 and HB 126 for introducing important legislation. She said as a former classroom teacher, she sees a lot of opportunities with Alaska Native recognition for classroom students to learn more about Alaska's heritage.

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CHAIR BISHOP stated that he is honored as chair of the committee to be able to pass the legislation along to the next committee. He noted that he had a question that pertains to, "the next ten-thousand years" and asked if a working group will be formed to address month-long celebrations during the month of November, including possible potlatches.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY replied that nothing has been planned, but the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs will be happy to work towards addressing celebrations during the month of November.

CHAIR BISHOP said after listening to Ms. Medicine Crow as well as being a father of two Native children, he said he believes that something could be done in the schools during the month of November for students to bring out who they are, where they are from, and their history regarding something that is important.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY summarized that the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs has been doing a lot of work to provide information to operate from a consistent foundation and knowledge level for Alaskans to step forward together in recognizing their unique shared history.

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SENATOR BIRCH moved to report HB 126, work order 31-LS0782\M from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note.

[3:44:07 PM](#)

CHAIR BISHOP announced that there be no objection, the motion carried.

3:44:30 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Bishop adjourned the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 3:44 p.m.