

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS**

February 4, 2025

8:06 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Maxine Dibert, Chair  
Representative Ashley Carrick  
Representative Andi Story

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke  
Representative Rebecca Schwanke  
Representative Jubilee Underwood  
Representative Elexie Moore

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION(S): ALASKA NATIVES 101

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

RENEE SEDAADZE LINTON, Director  
Alaska Native Policy Center  
First Alaskans Institute  
Holikachuk, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Alaska Natives 101 presentation.

AUSTEN SULUNAQ ERICKSON, Advancement Director  
First Alaskans Institute  
Utqiagvik, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-offered the Alaska Natives 101 presentation.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:06:42 AM](#)

**CHAIR MAXINE DIBERT** called the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. Representatives Carrick, Story, and Dibert were present at the call to order.

[Committee members, upon invitation from Chair Dibert, introduced themselves.]

**PRESENTATION(S): Alaska Natives 101**

[8:12:43 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT announced that the only order of business would be the Alaska Natives 101 presentation.

[8:13:17 AM](#)

RENEE SEDAADZE LINTON, Director, Alaska Native Policy Center, First Alaskans Institute, as co-presenter, began the Alaska Natives 101 presentation [hard copy included in committee packet], starting on slide 2, which gave a broad overview of the presentation and what it aimed to achieve. She skipped to slide 4, which highlighted that all Alaskans need to know about the over 10,000 years of stewardship and the distinction in cultures of Alaska Native People.

[8:19:20 AM](#)

AUSTEN SULUNAQ ERICKSON, Advancement Director, First Alaskans Institute, picked up the presentation on slide 5, and explained that tribal entities are sovereign alongside the state and federal government. He continued to slide 6, which displayed a map of Alaska that highlighted the expanse of Alaska Native tribes. He explained that in 1983 the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) granted federal recognition to every tribe in Alaska, even if the tribe no longer existed. He moved to slide 7 and discussed the importance in the cultures of Alaska Native people to care for their lands and for everyone to have a purpose to the community. To slide 8, he described the graph as depicting the categorization of the 20-plus distinct Alaska Native cultural groups and languages in Alaska. He additionally drew attention to Alaska Native people making up 19.5 percent of the population not being represented in government.

[8:24:17 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON moved to slide 9, which displayed a map of Alaska and neighboring regions divided by Alaska Native language

groups. She emphasized the Alaska Native people have the right to a traditional way of life which has been increasingly threatened over the past two centuries.

[8:26:06 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 8:26 a.m.

[8:26:41 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON resumed the presentation on slide 9, where she elaborated on the importance of tribal/governmental relationships.

[8:27:24 AM](#)

MR. SULUNAQ ERICKSON continued the presentation on slide 10, which displayed a map of Alaska that was divided by both the borders of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) corporations and the Alaska Native languages. He moved to slide 11, which touched on Alaska Natives' relationship with the State and Federal Government and emphasized that their relationship with the two entities is based on their political status, not a racial status. He continued to slide 12, which highlighted consultation, compacting, and contracting as three ways for Alaska Native entities to strengthen their relationships with government entities.

[8:31:03 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON picked up the presentation on slide 13, which described the different types of Alaska Native entities that currently exist in Alaska.

[8:34:25 AM](#)

MR. SULUNAQ ERICKSON moved to slide 14, which emphasized the complex nature of the relationships between Alaska Native entities and governmental entities. He continued to slide 15, which listed the various types and number of Alaska Native Organizations in Alaska.

[8:38:25 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON transitioned to slide 16 and described the difficulties with the recognition and funding of tribal jurisdiction.

[8:39:56 AM](#)

MR. SULUNAQ ERICKSON moved to slide 17, which highlighted the three law enforcement authorities that work with tribal entities in communities.

[8:41:50 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON moved to slide 18, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

"Hunger knows no law... what we struggle to get through is our hunger in our minds, spirit and souls. That's what happens when we aren't able to get out on the lands and water, to harvest for all of our sustenance. Hunger in our stomach, mind, body and soul. When our people are oppressed and restricted in our ways of life, it creates a void, a hurt that our Ancestors went through."

-Protecting Our Ways of Life Summit 2020

[8:43:41 AM](#)

MR. SULUNAQ ERICKSON transitioned to slide 19, which emphasized that Alaska Native peoples have been caretakers of their lands for thousands of years while maintaining abundance of resources. He continued to slide 20 and stated that Alaska Native people hold valuable knowledge to bring to discussions on issues within Alaska.

[8:47:01 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON moved to slide 21 and stated that building relationships, trust, respect, and recognition of self-determination and self-governance are the keys to working with Alaska Native people. To slide 22, she referenced a guide that discusses many frequently asked questions of Alaska Native peoples [hard copy included in committee packet]. She concluded the presentation on slide 23 and said "dogedinh" and "enaabaasee'."

[8:49:25 AM](#)

MR. SULUNAQ ERICKSON said "quyanagpak" and "quyana."

[8:50:30 AM](#)

[A music video titled "Our Stories" by Qacung Blanchett played before the committee.]

[8:55:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY listed the tribal entities within her district.

[8:57:19 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT commented on the tribal entities within her district as well.

[8:57:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY commented that Tlingit & Haida played a major role in Juneau's recent flood recovery efforts and shared her appreciation for the recommendation by the presenters to create relationships with Alaska Native people. She asked the presenters if they had any concerns regarding Village Public Safety Officers (VPSO.)

[9:00:28 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON replied that providing transportation for victims of violence to and out of cities is important.

[9:01:41 AM](#)

MR. SULUNAQ ERICKSON added that there needs to be more training for village police officers (VPO) and VPSOs and said that they are often trained for only two weeks before they work on their own. He said that they often feel alone and have little direction with regards to their work.

[9:03:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY provided her desire to see a report about VPSOs' salaries. She commented that it would be important for the Alaska State Legislature to include a training regarding Alaska Native peoples.

[9:05:15 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT cited a drowning and a missing persons case that occurred in her community and said that the first person she saw

working on the cases were VPSOs. She referred to SB 151 from the former legislature that passed and added two missing and murdered indigenous persons investigators.

[9:06:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK shared her agreement with Representative Story that she would like to see a training done on Alaska Native peoples and their relationships with the Alaska State Government. She asked to provide examples of compacting and contracting.

[9:07:53 AM](#)

MR. SULUNAQ ERICKSON provided his understanding that compact is a trust agreement, and a contract is a commanding agreement. He used the Indian Health Service as an example of a compact as it is provided funding without specific requirements towards its goals. He said that compacting is a "more hollistic way of looking at things." She clarified that the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was meant to reunify and strengthen indigenous families throughout the United States.

[9:09:41 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON added that the Indian Health Services compact contributed \$2 billion per year to the state. She emphasized that preserving Indigenous knowledge is paramount and said that she would like to see it in public school curriculum.

[9:11:18 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON, in response to a question from Representative Carrick, explained that the ICWA was created to ensure indigenous children stay within Indigenous families.

[9:13:12 AM](#)

MR. SULUNAQ ERICKSON added that ICWA is a good example of compacting that put the governance of Indigenous children in the hands of the tribes, not the federal or state's authority.

[9:14:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked the presenters to elaborate on their understanding of the salmon crisis on the Yukon River.

[9:15:33 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON answered that it is important to hear Alaska Native perspectives and recognize indigenous knowledge. She stated that trawl bycatch and climate change were the driving factors behind the salmon crisis.

[9:17:49 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT commented that her family is from the Tanana Ruby area and has been struggling for the past few years since there has been a decline in salmon on the Yukon River. She shared that the first meeting of the 34th Legislature's House Resources Standing Committee worked to address the salmon crisis.

[9:19:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY opined that the House Resources Standing Committee should look at Sitka and its declining herring eggs.

[9:20:24 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON, in response to a question from Representative Carrick, stated that the indigenous economy is not competitive in contrast to Western economies. She opined that moving the Subsistence Division from the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities to the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development.

[9:22:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY commented that she appreciated the music video and would like to see more recognition for rural dance groups.

[9:23:44 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT echoed Representative Story's remarks and said that she would like to hear more Alaska Native languages before the committee.

[9:24:27 AM](#)

MR. SULUNAQ ERICKSON added that the First Alaskans Institute has a "language of the year" and said that he would support the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs to hear more Alaska Native words. He highlighted one of his favorite words,

"pukuk," which he defined as: being nosy, picking through others' things, or touching things that aren't yours.

[9:25:48 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON said that her language of Holikachuk Athabascan went extinct in the 1970s and emphasized that preserving and revitalizing Indigenous languages is extremely important, as it gives Alaska Native peoples their identity.

[9:27:03 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT commented about the current resources available to revitalizing Alaska Native languages and stated that the committee could investigate ways of supporting the effort.

[9:27:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY said she would like to see the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs do a "word of the week." She provided her understanding that the council of Alaska Native Languages moved from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Education.

[9:28:39 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT added that she would like to hear from the commissioner of Alaska Department of Fish & Game about a follow up on the Yukon salmon crisis.

[9:29:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK commented that the committee may be the first comprised only of women. She stated that she would like to see the committee focus on addressing issues facing girls and women.

[9:30:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY said gunalcheesh to the presenters and further clarified that she is aware that Alaska Native people of all tribes are spread across the state.

[9:32:08 AM](#)

MR. SULUNAQ ERICKSON commented that he would like to make himself available to help the committee in any way possible.



[9:32:55 AM](#)

MS. SEDAADZE LINTON clarified that the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council was meeting this week in Anchorage, Alaska, and said that she would like to see Alaska Native peoples help contribute more to data collections.

[9:34:34 AM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 9:34 a.m.