

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS

April 24, 2025

8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Maxine Dibert, Chair
Representative Ashley Carrick
Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke
Representative Andi Story
Representative Rebecca Schwanke
Representative Jubilee Underwood
Representative Elexie Moore

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION (S): CHICKALOON VILLAGE TRIBAL POLICE & COURTS

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 59

"An Act relating to demonstration state-tribal education compacts; relating to demonstration state-tribal education compact schools; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 59

SHORT TITLE: STATE-TRIBAL EDUCATION COMPACTS

SPONSOR(S): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	TRB, EDC
02/11/25	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/11/25	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
02/13/25	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/13/25	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
02/18/25	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/18/25	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
03/13/25	(H)	TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

03/13/25 (H) Heard & Held
03/13/25 (H) MINUTE (TRB)
04/08/25 (H) TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/08/25 (H) Heard & Held
04/08/25 (H) MINUTE (TRB)
04/24/25 (H) TRB AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

DONNA ANTHONY, Chief
Chickaloon Tribal Police Department
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Chickaloon Village Tribal Police and Courts."

RICK GARCIA, Director of Law and Policy; Tribal Judge
Alaska Native Women's Resource Center;
Traditional Tribal Court
Chickaloon Village
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the presentation on the Chickaloon Village Tribal Police.

PHILIP LING, Director
Traditional Tribal Court
Chickaloon Village
Chickaloon, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the presentation on the Chickaloon Village Tribal Police.

JOEL ISAAK, PhD, Compacting Consultant
Department of Education and Early Development
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of the sponsor, House Rules by request of the governor, gave an overview of HB 59.

DEENA BISHOP, EdD, Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of the sponsor, House Rules by request of the governor, spoke to HB 59.

TRISTAN DOUVILLE, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided public testimony in support of HB 59.

MISCHA JACKSON, Tribal Education Liaison
Education Development
Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Joshua Jackson, provided public testimony in support of HB 59.

MICHAELYN JACKSON, student
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided public testimony in support of HB 59.

JODIE GATTI, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided public testimony in support of HB 59.

SONTA ROACH, representing self
Shageluk, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided public testimony in support of HB 59.

JESSICA ULRICH, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided public testimony in support of HB 59.

REID MAGDANZ, representing self
Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided public testimony in support of HB 59.

ALICIA MARYOTT, President
Alaska Native Sisterhood Camp 70
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided public testimony in support of HB 59.

EMILY ROSEBERRY, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided public testimony in support of HB 59.

WAYNE WOODGATE, Federal Programs Director
Yupiiit School District
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided public testimony in support of HB 59.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:32 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT called the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Carrick, Schwanke, and Dibert were present at the call to order. Representatives Burke, Story, Underwood, and Moore arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION (S): CHICKALOON VILLAGE TRIBAL POLICE & COURTS

[8:03:17 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT announced that the first order of business would be a presentation by the Chickaloon Village Tribal Police and Courts.

[8:04:12 AM](#)

DONNA ANTHONY, Chief, Chickaloon Tribal Police Department (Chickaloon PD), gave a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Chickaloon Village Tribal Police and Courts," [hard copy included in the committee packet]. She shared that she was born and raised in Alaska, and she elaborated on her 20 years of experience working for law enforcement. On slide 2, she pointed out that the presentation and project is supported by a grant awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). She moved to slide 3 and pointed out the agenda for the presentation, which includes discussing the purpose, mission, vision, and history of Chickaloon PD. She stated that she would discuss the process of starting a tribal police department, along with Chickaloon PD's hiring process. She pointed out that Chickaloon PD is requesting to be recognized by the Alaska Police Standards Council (APSC). She moved to slide 4 and slide 5, which displayed photos of Chickaloon PD officers and staff.

[8:07:17 AM](#)

CHIEF ANTHONY, moving to slide 6 and slide 7, stated that the purpose of the presentation is to introduce the new tribal police department model. She explained that the tribal police department's mission would be to uphold tribal, state, and

federal laws; protect life and property; and promote and preserve peace within the community through safe, humane, and effective law enforcement. She stated that the values upheld by Chickaloon PD include building peace, not only through enforcement, but also by fostering public trust through proactive community engagement. She emphasized that the tribal aspect equates to the community. She moved to the next slide and gave examples of the officers' involvement in the community.

CHIEF ANTHONY stated that the vision of the tribal police department is to enhance tribal public safety and justice in Alaska and advance the regional tribal court system. She noted that the Defense Intelligence Agency has given funding to several tribes to build court systems, with Chickaloon being the first in the state with tribal criminal codes. She stated that for a tribe to have its own police department, it must first have a court system with criminal codes. She noted that this presentation has been shown across the state to help tribes build these steps. She pointed out that, in building up its police department, Chickaloon has obtained StarLink to help with emergency systems. She discussed the Tribal Access Program (TAP), which requires having a fingerprint machine.

CHIEF ANTHONY moved to slide 8 and discussed enhancing tribal public safety and justice in the state. She discussed the department's officer training program, pointing out that Chickaloon PD is the first federally recognized tribal police department with access to the Alaska Public Safety Information Network (APSIN). She noted that the department is working at strengthening partnerships with other agencies, such as with state troopers and other local police departments. She added that the department has the goal of building a tribal detention center, including youth courts and drug rehabilitation programs to stop recidivism. She continued that Chickaloon PD has the goal of becoming a training center for all tribes in the state. She reiterated that other tribes would like their own departments, and she expressed the importance of setting a standard. She pointed out that one of the department's focuses would be mentoring youth.

[8:13:13 AM](#)

CHIEF ANTHONY moved to slide 9 and slide 10 to discuss the history of Chickaloon PD. She had been retired when asked to help build the tribal police department in Chickaloon, so she had to learn the history and the setbacks. Concerning its history, she stated that the department was established in the

1980s; however, in 2020 APSC decided not to give tribal police state authority. Despite previous training and certifications, this decision has hindered the ability of Chickaloon PD to operate with state authority. She discussed the Sutton Community Council's opposition to the recognition of the Chickaloon tribal police officers, even with the enactment of the Violence Against Women Act 2022 (VAWA 2022). She noted that tribes in Alaska share concurrent jurisdiction with state and federal partners.

CHIEF ANTHONY moved to slide 11 and explained that VAWA 2022 gave more authority to tribes in Alaska by including the jurisdiction of a village. Concerning the 2020 U.S. Census, she pointed out that the size of the Chickaloon Tribe's jurisdiction is the size of the State of Connecticut, as seen on the next slide. She pointed out that there is a low number of tribal citizens in the area, but the Chickaloon Village Traditional Tribal Court takes cases from other areas beyond its boundaries in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley.

[8:17:47 AM](#)

CHIEF ANTHONY, on slide 13, pointed out that in VAWA 2022, Section 813, tribal jurisdiction was extended over non-Native perpetrators of violent crimes. She explained that this enhances tribal sovereignty and law enforcement coordination. She expressed the understanding that this would stop perpetrators from hiding in Native jurisdictions, as seen in the Lower 48 with Indian Reservations.

CHIEF ANTHONY moved from slide 14 to slide 19 and addressed the process to start a tribal police department. She explained that tribal police departments in the state are not fully recognized unless they have obtained an Originating Agency Identifier from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and DOJ. She noted that the Chickaloon PD is the first tribal department in the state to have this. She explained that when starting a department, policies and procedures would need to be developed, such as a code of conduct and patrol guidelines. She noted the importance of evidence handling, as improper procedures have shut down police departments.

CHIEF ANTHONY addressed the necessary equipment needed for a remote police force dispatch system, and she indicated that StarLink is now being used. She reiterated the benefits of having TAP, as it is a direct link to the FBI. She stated that all officers would be trained under APSIN for accessing state

and national databases, such as warrants and criminal records. She stated that memorandums of agreement with local and state law enforcement agencies, federal agencies, and the tribal governments are necessary, as these agreements facilitate joint operations and information sharing. She gave the recommendation that for any new tribal police department, the chief should have at least 10 years of law enforcement experience.

CHIEF ANTHONY moved from slide 20 to slide 22 and discussed the hiring process for officers, noting that APSC should be followed. She reviewed Chickaloon PD's process, which includes an interview with the oral board, a background check, a psychological evaluation, a physical exam, and a polygraph. After this, applications are sent for review by the U.S. Indian Police Academy or the University of Fairbanks, and then to APCS. At this point, she said the officers would be sent to a 16-week police academy. She noted that for Chickaloon PD, this is funded by grants, and sending officers for training to the U.S. Indian Police Academy would be free. She emphasized the importance of post-academy training, and she discussed the field training requirements. Because of the lack of backup and response in remote Alaska, she stressed that hands-on training with real-world patrols and mentorship is crucial.

[8:26:40 AM](#)

CHIEF ANTHONY moved to slide 23 and pointed out the breakdown of the department. She explained the different facilities that are needed for tribal citizens and non-tribal citizens, reiterating that Chickaloon PD is hindered because it is not recognized by the state. She noted that the Department of Law has been helpful in situations involving certain cases.

CHIEF ANTHONY moved to slide 25 and pointed out her vision of the future of tribal law enforcement. She moved to the next slide and stated that the tribal model under discussion is not new, but new for Alaska. She noted that tribal police departments in Washington State are recognized by the state, and these police officers are sent to the state academy. She pointed out that some states in the Lower 48 have dual commission for their Indian police officers. She emphasized the need for the tribal police departments in Alaska to work with the state, local, federal, and tribal agencies.

[8:29:05 AM](#)

CHIEF ANTHONY urged the legislature to look at the statutes concerning officer recognition, and she asserted the tribal police should be recognized under the same APSC standards as other officers in the state. She moved to the next slide and pointed out that recognition matters, as this would ensure standardization in training, hiring, and accountability. Interagency collaboration and communication would be enhanced. She noted that one of the main reasons for this would be to strengthen public trust. On slide 27, she pointed out that the State of Alaska Statutes currently recognizes the Alaska Railroad Corporation Police Department and the University of Alaska Police Department, but not the Chickaloon PD. She reiterated that Chickaloon PD hits the same standards as these departments.

CHIEF ANTHONY, on slide 28, discussed examples of the tribal police departments that have been recognized in Washington State. She stated that they work with local, federal, and state agencies. In conclusion, she argued that Alaska could do the same thing.

[8:31:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK asked if APSC has reversed its 2020 decision, and she questioned the result of APSC recognition.

CHIEF ANTHONY responded that APSC's decision has not been reversed because it would be up to the legislature. She stated that if tribal police were recognized, Chickaloon would have state commission and be able to work with state and local partners.

[8:32:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked for clarification on her response to the previous question, and she expressed confusion concerning how the legislature could affect APSC.

CHIEF ANTHONY responded that a letter has advised her that Chickaloon PD does not have state authority, and she offered to share the letter with the committee. She maintained that research has been done and tribal police are not recognized under the state statute.

[8:33:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE UNDERWOOD questioned the difficulties that Chickaloon PD has faced concerning recognition by APSC.

CHIEF ANTHONY expressed the understanding that there is concern that a tribal officer could arrest a non-Native person and put the person in a Native facility. She argued that this represents miscommunication, and DOJ and the state should provide education on this. If Chickaloon PD had state commission, she said that only tribal members would go to tribal detention facilities. She continued that any non-Natives would go to the local district attorney's office for due process procedures.

[8:34:44 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT questioned how this message could be communicated to gain public trust.

CHIEF ANTHONY responded that the Alaska State Troopers have worked to help the situation, as a public information officer was sent to Sutton to explain that the initial APSC recognition would begin with some restrictions to Chickaloon PD. She expressed the understanding that this could help slowly earn the public trust. She argued that Chickaloon needs this because the area has no law enforcement. She discussed the burglaries and drug activity in the area. She said, "My hands are tied, and the criminals know this." She argued that if tribal police do anything wrong, the department would be investigated, and the certificate could be taken away. She asserted that this comes down to educating the public.

CHAIR DIBERT asked if she has given the presentation to the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN).

CHIEF ANTHONY expressed the opinion that AFN is not "up to speed" with the courts and the tribal police, but she has been flown across the state to discuss this model, as "many villages are begging for help with the crime that's occurring." She noted that 40 percent of the state does not have law enforcement, and she advised the committee that this is a problem. She expressed the understanding that giving tribal police state recognition would not affect the state's budget because of the grants from the federal government.

[8:37:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE stated that she lives near Chickaloon, and she has heard concern about highway stops. She noted that Chickaloon is on the highway, which creates a different geographic situation from other remote villages. She questioned whether there are maps outlining different village statistical areas around Chickaloon.

CHIEF ANTHONY noted that there are other maps, but these areas are not as large as Chickaloon. She added that Chickaloon and Knik are the largest jurisdictions. In response to a follow-up question, she stated that this information could be found online. She deferred to Rick Garcia.

[8:39:38 AM](#)

RICK GARCIA, Director of Law and Policy, Alaska Native Women's Resource Center (ANWRC); Tribal Judge, Traditional Tribal Court, Chickaloon Native Village, responded that these maps are compiled by the U.S. Census Bureau, and there would be links for each area of concern.

[8:40:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE questioned actions taken to address the drug trafficking in Chickaloon and the surrounding areas.

CHIEF ANTHONY responded that for six years she worked on the Alaska State Troopers' drug taskforce, travelling all over the state to investigate drug operations. She expressed the opinion that Alaska's drug problem has gotten worse. She expressed frustration that Chickaloon PD cannot do traffic stops on federal highways, and the drug problem in the state is not being addressed. She stated that Chickaloon PD has been working with agents from DEA and the U.S. Postal Service. She noted that this is a "big issue in Toksook," where drug dealers are breaking into the post office to steal packages of drugs, and the Elders there are being threatened, but nothing has been done. She expressed the opinion that without state recognition and authority for the tribal police department, the situation is more difficult. She explained that currently she must wait for DEA, a state trooper, or a postal agent before proceeding with any cases. She reiterated that the process of what needs to be done in the state is being hindered.

[8:43:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked if ANWRC is funded completely with grants. She expressed concern on the reliability of the grants, and she requested a history of this grant funding.

CHIEF ANTHONY responded that the Chickaloon PD receives several grants, including DOJ grants that support its administration and the hiring of officers. She noted that tribes cannot receive economic development grants, and the department depends completely on federal grants. She expressed the understanding that federal agencies have continued to support tribes in the Lower 48 concerning drug crimes, and she expressed the opinion that this support would include Alaska. She expressed uncertainty concerning other grants that tribes might receive.

[8:45:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE questioned Chickaloon PD's process of becoming recognized by the state. She questioned the committee's ability to become involved as a partner.

CHIEF ANTHONY responded that Chickaloon PD's established tribal criminal code addresses tribal citizens, but this would be only at a misdemeanor level. She reiterated that the Department of Law is working with Chickaloon PD, but the process takes longer than it should because Chickaloon PD does not have its state commission. She noted that Chickaloon PD is requesting a special law enforcement commission with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), so federal cases could be addressed by the U.S. Attorney's Office. This would be specific for known sex offenders and drug dealers. She stated that BIA would be inspecting the site concerning Chickaloon PD's request for commission.

[8:48:25 AM](#)

CHIEF ANTHONY, on behalf of the Chickaloon Village, expressed appreciation for being able to present to the committee, and she invited members to visit the village and the tribal police department.

[8:49:09 AM](#)

MR. GARCIA reiterated Chief Anthony's comments. He expressed the importance of discussing tribal safety and tribal courts.

[8:49:50 AM](#)

PHILIP LING, Director, Traditional Tribal Court, Chickaloon Village, concurred with Mr. Garcia and Chief Anthony. He thanked the committee for its time, as tribal justice and public safety is an important issue in the village.

[8:50:54 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:50 a.m. to 8:55 a.m.

HB 59-STATE-TRIBAL EDUCATION COMPACTS

[8:55:20 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 59, "An Act relating to demonstration state-tribal education compacts; relating to demonstration state-tribal education compact schools; and providing for an effective date."

[8:55:55 AM](#)

JOEL ISAAK, PhD, Compacting Consultant, Department of Education and Early Development, gave a brief overview of HB 59. He stated that the proposed legislation would create a pathway for tribes to operate their own public schools in the state. He explained that the tribes would be functioning as school districts, modeled after Mount Edgecumbe High School. He continued that this would give the tribes more direction over their educational system, as they would be hiring and training their own staff. He added that the tribally compacted schools would follow existing reporting requirements. He expressed the opinion that school compacting would increase student learning and outcomes.

[8:58:12 AM](#)

DEENA BISHOP, EdD, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, on behalf of the sponsor, House Rules by request of the governor, spoke to HB 59. She stated that during the creation of Alaska's Education Challenge there were more than 15,000 people with input. In these comments, tribal compacting was listed as one of the top five ways to improve Alaska's public education system. She pointed out that in 2022, the governor's education priorities listed tribal school compacting. She also pointed out that Senate Bill 34 [passed during the Thirty-Second Alaska State Legislature] had set tribal compacting into action. In conclusion, she stated that

Alaskans, the governor, and the legislature "have spoken," and she urged the committee to pass HB 59, as this would serve all of Alaska's students.

[9:00:54 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT opened public testimony on HB 59.

[9:01:42 AM](#)

TRISTAN DOUVILLE, representing self, testified in support of HB 59. He shared his Tlingit name and tribal heritage. He stated that he works at the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska and is a former school board member for the Craig City School District. He continued that he has dedicated his career to tribal self-determination, including a tenure in Washinton D.C. He pointed out that he has witnessed partnerships thriving, but he has also witnessed situations when tribes are invited only "to advise, but not to decide." He argued that when there is tribal leadership, outcomes improve; however, tribes are still waiting for this opportunity with education. He stated that the proposed legislation would move the role of tribes from consultation to governance, and this would ensure that schools reflect the cultures, values, and strengths of Alaska Native communities.

[9:04:43 AM](#)

MISCHA JACKSON, representing self, on behalf of Joshua Jackson, expressed support for the proposed legislation. She shared that she works for the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, but today she would be giving a recitation from a testimony written by her husband, Joshua Jackson. She paraphrased from his testimony, as follows:

Madame Chair Dibert and members of the House Tribal Affairs Committee, my name is Joshua Jackson. I've been a certified teacher in the Juneau School District for 17 years, and I currently teach in a K-1 classroom in the Tlingit Culture, Language, and Literacy (TCLL) program at Harborview Elementary, where I have been teaching for the past 10 years. I am a proud, longtime Indigenous educator in the district, one of only a few still teaching, and I am writing in strong support of HB 59.

At TCLL, our students, most of whom are Alaska Native, thrive when learning in an environment that reflects their identity and builds on their strengths. This success doesn't happen by chance, it takes unwavering dedication from our staff to create and protect that space within a system that wasn't built for us. Over the last 10 years, what TCLL has offered me, as an Indigenous educator, is a loving and caring staff that knows what it takes to support each other and our families. We create our own community that feeds off the strength and balances of our clans, villages, and our values, and it works. Our students, our families, and our staff thrive when they see themselves reflected in the education system.

But here's the reality: despite the success of TCLL, it remains just a program. We lack autonomy - we share a building, we share services, and too often our students miss out, whether it's because of late buses, limited access to teachers, specials, or after school activities that don't align with our schedule. Every year we are advocating for something new and trying to be heard. The time has come - át koowaháa - it's time for education to be put back in the hands of our people. We know what works for our students and our communities. Our tribes know what works for our families and our communities. HB 59 creates that opportunity. Tribes aren't asking for special treatment. They're asking for the authority to lead and design public schools where culture, language, and community are the foundation, not the add on that you have to advocate for. I'll leave you with this: every year my TCLL K-1 class has a waitlist. Every year we turn away families because there isn't enough space. HB 59 would open doors across Alaska, giving families real choices and greater access to culturally grounded tribal schools committed to student success. I urge you to support and advance HB 59 without delay. Gunalchéesh.

[9:07:42 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT expressed appreciation for Mr. Jackson's words, and his reflection on the identity of Native Alaskans. She expressed the importance of seeing a teacher "that looks like us."

[9:08:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BURKE expressed appreciation for the testimony. She shared that her grandmother taught the Iñupiaq language for 41 years, and she expressed gratitude that her children can be part of an immersion program in Iñupiaq. She reiterated the importance of having cultural identity in schools.

[9:09:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE expressed gratitude for Ms. Jackson's presence and dedication to the cause.

[9:10:07 AM](#)

MICHAELYN JACKSON, student, testified in support of HB 59. She shared her Tlingit name and that she is in the sixth grade. She stated that she attends TCLL at Harborview Elementary. She thanked the committee members for the opportunity to speak. She expressed support for the proposed legislation because it allows her to attend a school program designed by Tlingit teachers. She explained that the school is different because of the Tlingit language classes, oral narratives, and the song and dance. She stated that Elders are in classes daily. She noted that she has been attending language classes for seven years, but she expressed the need for more. She described her younger sister's preschool, where her sister speaks Tlingit all day in class. She expressed the desire for this to happen in her school. She expressed the understanding that HB 59 would allow tribes to run their own schools, giving students more educational options and space. She said, "Right now we are crammed into an elementary school, and some of my classmates are taller than some teachers." She urged the committee to support the proposed legislation.

[9:12:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE thanked the testifier, commenting that it was brave of her to attend the meeting and speak.

CHAIR DIBERT commented that this is a great way for students to be a part of democracy. She pointed out that she was not taught the Koyukon Athabascan language as a student, and she expressed the importance of learning language. She thanked the testifier.

[9:13:52 AM](#)

JODIE GATTI, representing self, testified in support of HB 59. She expressed pride in being a citizen of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. She shared that she is the mother of two young tribal citizens, with her five-year-old attending an immersion program for the last two years, where three days a week he is immersed in the Tlingit language. She expressed the opinion that the learning environment in the school is "priceless" because of the dedication of his teachers. She noted that Elders help in the school, making sure the language is culturally and linguistically accurate. She expressed gratitude at being able to watch her son read books to her mother in Tlingit. She noted that her mother was from a generation when the language was not spoken, as she lived during "the boarding school era," and she said, "This is what generational healing looks like." She related a story of being a victim of racism at five years old, as at that time, no one was speaking Tlingit, and there were no cultural components in her education.

MS. GATTI expressed the opinion that HB 59 would offer a different path, rooted in self-determination and intergenerational healing. She added that school compacting would recognize what tribes already know concerning the success of their children. She asserted that the tribes are ready, but she questioned whether school districts are ready to receive students who have a strong foundation in their culture. She urged the committee to pass the proposed legislation.

CHAIR DIBERT commented on the importance of having Elders in the schools. She shared her history of teaching, noting that she had invited Elders into her classroom.

[9:18:51 AM](#)

SONTA ROACH, representing self, testified in support of HB 59. She shared that she is an assistant professor of Alaska Native Studies and Rural Development at the [University of Alaska Fairbanks] and is a part of the Shageluk Native Village Tribe. She shared that she is a former public-school teacher and has served on her regional Native corporation board. She pointed out that elements of traditional education, cultural identity, connection to place, and the way of being have been integrated piecemeal into some schools in Alaska; however, she added that this integration would depend on the variables of leadership and funding streams at the schools. For this type of education, such as language immersion, she said, "We have only scratched the surface of this work as a state." She argued that tribally

compacted public schools would be a model of true local control, emphasizing that local control is one of the state's priorities. She acknowledged that sustainable outcomes for tribal schools have yet to be seen, especially because retaining local teachers and administrators is difficult; however, she opined that when control is leveraged at the local level, these outcomes would represent the "best" work. She continued, arguing the benefits of local control of tribal education. She stated that school compacting is one of the strongest mechanisms of government on a tribal level. In conclusion, she maintained that one of a sovereign nation's fundamental rights would be educating its children.

[9:22:19 AM](#)

JESSICA ULRICH, representing self, testified in support of HB 59. She shared that she is a tribal citizen and an assistant research professor in Washington State, concentrating on the community health of Indigenous families and intergenerational wellbeing. She stated that currently she is working on school compacting in a Nome tribal community. She shared that she had helped to bring Elders, parents, and children together in a wellness workshop, with the goal of sharing traditional knowledge and promoting connectedness using cultural and subsistence activities. She discussed the success of this event and gave examples. She argued that tribes need education that aligns with Indigenous ways of knowing and being, as this has sustained the health of the collective for generations.

MS. ULRICH stated that compacted schools would teach reading, writing, math, and other subjects in a way to help students know who they are and where they come from. She quoted the Elder, Richard A. Tuck, who said, "We need old-time solutions using modern day tools." She suggested that compact schools have the potential to honor the local Indigenous knowledge, providing a model for the entire state, and potentially the country.

MS. ULRICH spoke about a current project that is developing Indigenous education assessments, as these could be used by tribally compacted schools. She asserted that tribal education should be aligned with the wisdom of ancestors for the benefit of all future generations.

[9:25:41 AM](#)

REID MAGDANZ, representing self, testified in support of HB 59. He thanked the committee. He shared that he is a lifelong

Alaskan and a product of the public school system in the state. He stated that he became aware of tribal compacting when it was first discussed in Alaska's Education Challenge. He expressed the opinion that HB 59 "represents the best shot" for a lasting gain in student achievement. He argued that studies on improving student outcomes in rural Alaska have had the same results - make the schools reflect the students and the community. In other words, connect what is happening outside of the school to what is happening inside of the school.

MR. MAGDANZ spoke about his experience attending school in rural Alaska. He attributed the low success rate of some of the students in his school to the lack of community [in the school]. He reiterated that what was happening in the classroom was very different from home and village life. He expressed the opinion that tribal compacting has more potential than other efforts to "change this reality."

MR. MAGDANZ expressed the opinion that the immersion school in Kotzebue has demonstrated success, as the school is based on local culture, with all local teachers. He noted that it has operated for over 20 years. He stated that the students not only acquire knowledge of language and cultural skills, but they also model respectful behavior and leadership. He maintained that this is the "promise of tribal compacting". He continued that the proposed legislation is the product of "real discussion" between communities, educators, tribes, and the state. He argued that it would maintain the state's constitutional responsibility of providing education, while giving tribes the control to make a change in their schools. He urged the committee to support HB 59.

[9:29:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BURKE expressed her appreciation to the testifier.

[9:30:23 AM](#)

ALICIA MARYOTT, President, Alaska Native Sisterhood Camp 70, representing self, testified in support of HB 59. She shared her Tlingit name and her heritage. She stated that she is a tribal citizen. Along with being the president of the Alaska Native Sisterhood Camp 70, she stated that she is also an education councilor. She stated that she is testifying on behalf of the sisterhood, which has been advocating for Native land claims, health care, education, and subsistence since 1915.

She argued that the proposed legislation would represent an important opportunity to honor tribal sovereignty, invest in children, and reshape public education to reflect the culture and values of Alaska Native communities. She noted the success rate of compacting in Native health care and child welfare, arguing that education should be no exception.

MS. MARYOTT stated that HB 59 would create a path for tribes to operate public schools grounded in local priorities, governed with community oversight, and guided by traditional knowledge and cultural relevance. She explained that these would not be private or charter schools, but public institutions following the same funding and accountability of other public schools. She argued that while Alaska Native students represent nearly 30 percent of all Alaska students, the current system continues to "fall short in meeting their educational needs." She pointed out that school compacting would enable students to see themselves in the curriculum, to be taught in their Native languages, and to be supported by educators who understand the students' histories and strengths. She spoke about the collaboration that went into creating the proposed legislation, and she advised the committee "it is time to take the next step." She asserted that the support of the proposed legislation would confirm the state's support of educational equity.

[9:33:33 AM](#)

EMILY ROSEBERRY, representing self, testified in support of HB 59. She shared that she is a former educator and principal, and one of the co-founders of Qargi Academy Tribal School. She noted that she is originally from Barrow. She expressed the importance for students to be rooted in their identities, connected to their heritage, and involved in the culture, as this sets the foundation of learning for Native peoples.

MS. ROSEBERRY stated that she has witnessed Native students being taught in the public education system, and she expressed "no surprise" for the low outcomes of these students. She argued that this is because local people have not been involved in the actual teaching in the schools, as this would make a "huge difference." She expressed pride that Qargi Academy participates in tribal compacting, noting the progress that students have made there. She stated that Qargi Academy is "vastly different" from the public school system, as local people are the teachers. She pointed out that having local

teachers builds student identity. She urged the passage of HB 59.

[9:38:48 AM](#)

WAYNE WOODGATE, Federal Programs Director, Yupiit School District, testified in support of HB 59. He expressed the opinion that the proposed legislation holds significance for the future of Native children, pointing out that for generations, the state's education system has not honored the cultural heritage, languages, and ways of knowing of Indigenous communities. He argued that HB 59 would offer an opportunity to reshape this landscape by empowering tribes to exercise their educational sovereignty. He asserted that this would not just be a procedural change, but a recognition of tribal rights for self-determination. By allowing tribes to enter into direct agreements with the state, this legislation would pave the way for development of community-driven and culturally responsive models.

MR. WOODGATE argued that the proposed legislation would create innovation within the education system, as tribes would have the autonomy to design and implement Native education programs that differ significantly from "the one size fits all model." He explained that each participating tribal community would be able to address its own needs and aspirations. He pointed out the importance of this for Alaska Native children and tribal self-governance.

MR. WOODGATE recommended that Section 6 of the proposed legislation be reviewed, specifically the provision on reporting to the state. He argued that the measurement of Native Alaska students' success should be done within each unique cultural context, and the tribal education leaders should do this assessment. He continued that allowing the tribes to set the parameters of success would ensure that evaluations reflect their distinct philosophies and goals. He argued that HB 59 would be an investment in the future of Alaska, an affirmation of tribal sovereignty in education, and a commitment to providing Native students with culturally rich and relevant education. He thanked the committee and urged the passage of the proposed legislation.

[9:42:13 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT expressed appreciation for the testimony and the comments on Indigenous learning styles.

[9:42:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK thanked the testifiers, especially the student testifier. She expressed the opinion that the proposed legislation would be beneficial to the tribes.

[9:44:27 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony.

[9:44:52 AM](#)

DR. ISAAK pointed out that the testifiers had provided good examples for why tribal school compacting is needed. He expressed the belief that HB 59 has the technical ingredients to make compacting possible. He asserted that this would be an opportunity for the stakeholders and the legislature to work together for students.

CHAIR DIBERT announced that HB 59 was held over.

[9:48:56 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 9:49 a.m.