



CENTRAL COUNCIL

*Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska*

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **28<sup>th</sup> Alaska State Legislature Passes House Bill 216**

The Alaska State Senate passed House Bill (HB) 216 at 3:15 AM this morning with a vote 18-2 on the last day of the 90-day legislative session. The passage of the bill is a remarkable win for Alaska Native people. Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Tlingit Haida) celebrates this momentous day in the history of tribal and state relations. HB 216 identifies 20 Alaska Native languages as official languages of the State. The bill moved earlier in the House with strong support (38-0) and, once signed, will make Alaska the second state following Hawaii to officially recognize indigenous languages.

Over the past month, tribal citizens, delegates, community council members, leaders, and elders provided testimonials and demonstrations in support of the bill. A group of "Language Warriors" held vigil in front of Senator Lesil McGuire's office to ensure the bill was scheduled in the Senate for vote and later flooded the Senate gallery to wait and watch as the bill was taken up for vote.

Although the bill is viewed as largely symbolic, the momentum created by supporters is historic and means so much more as we make progress towards a brighter future for our tribal citizens, cultures, and languages. Just last week, elected delegates of the Tlingit Haida passed three resolutions in support of language during the 79<sup>th</sup> Tribal Assembly held April 9-12, 2014 in Juneau, Alaska:

- **TA 14-15, Formation of a Language Department** authorizes Tlingit Haida Central Council to develop a Language Department that will serve to unify existing programs, identify regional language projects like language nests and immersion schools, locate funding to pay fluent speakers for their time in language projects, and support the community of new and existing speakers.
- **TA 14-16, Supporting Heritage Language and Pathways to Teaching** requests the University of Alaska define pathways for students to become certified language teachers and requests the Governor's Language Commission and Alaska school districts support the adoption of statewide heritage language learning standards and pathways for students to participate in heritage language coursework.
- **TA 14-17, Supporting House Bill 216, Official Languages of the State of Alaska** calls for full support of HB 216 as it moves through the 28<sup>th</sup> Alaska State Legislature.

Newly elected Tlingit Haida President Richard Peterson carried the message of support forward as he joined supporters on Sunday, April 20, at the Alaska State Capitol. "Tlingit Haida stands behind this movement," President Peterson said. "Our theme for this year's Tribal Assembly was 'For our Future Generations' and with that in our hearts and minds we adopted Tribal Assembly resolution 14-15 which will establish a language department within Tlingit Haida. There is a movement in the air and we are reclaiming our culture, our heritage. We look to our past to see what was taken from us in order to move into the future to reclaim what is ours."

Tlingit Haida would like to express its appreciation to Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins for his support and introduction of the bill to the House State Affairs Committee. Without his keen attentiveness to the heart and soul of Southeast Alaska's Native people, we could not have celebrated this day.

Other vigilant supporters are elders Selina Everson, Marge Dutson, David Katzeek, Della Cheney, Irene Cadiente, and Lillian Austin; Alaska Native Brotherhood/Sisterhood Grand Camp Presidents William Martin and Freda Westman; First Alaskans President Liz Medicine Crow, Dionne Cadiente-Laiti and Paul Berg of Goldbelt Heritage Foundation; Tribal Court Chief Justice Debra O'Gara and Tribal Court Judge-Delegate-University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) Professor X'unei Lance Twitchell; Deacon Charles Rohrbacher; former Tlingit Haida youth representatives Ricky Tagaban and Frank Konrad; Ishmael Hope of Sealaska Heritage Institute; and several students of Alaska Native Languages & Studies at UAS. Tlingit Haida Central Council would also like to thank Julie Kitka of the Alaska Federation of Natives and Rosita Worl of Sealaska Heritage Foundation.

"This is wonderful day. We stood in unity for our dearly departed, our grandchildren to come, our elders who give us strength, and one another," Lance Twitchell said. "We stood for our languages and equality, and at long last we succeeded."

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