



May 7, 2012

The Honorable Don Young  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2314 Russell House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

Dear Rep. Young:

On behalf of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, we write to urge you to include provisions that will enable Tribal governments in Alaska to more effectively combat an epidemic of domestic violence against Native American and Alaska Native women, as you consider any Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) reauthorization.

Nationally, Native women are raped and assaulted at 2.5 times the national average. The U.S. Department of Justice has found the current system of justice “inadequate to stop the pattern of escalating violence against Native women.” Tribal leaders, police officers, and prosecutors have all testified that violence that goes unaddressed—with beating after beating, each more severe than the last—all too often leads to death or severe physical injury.

Although Alaska Natives comprise only 15.2 percent of the population in Alaska, they comprise nearly 50 percent of the victims of domestic violence and 61 percent of the victims of sexual assault. *See UAA Justice Center Report To The Council On Domestic Violence And Sexual Assault* (May 13, 2010). According to one regional study, Native women in the Ahtna region are three times more likely to experience domestic violence than other women in the U.S., and 8-12 times more likely to experience physical assault. *See Intimate Partner Violence against Ahtna Women* (August 2006). The statistics were even worse among Athabascan women, 64 percent of whom reported that they had experienced domestic violence. *See Intimate Partner Violence Against Athabascan Women Residing in Interior Alaska* (November 6, 2006). Approximately half of the perpetrators in these situations are also Alaska Native.

Unfortunately, the state of Alaska’s public safety system does not effectively serve vast areas of the state where many remote Alaska Native villages are located, except in response to crimes that result in severe injury or death. The vast majority of Alaska Native communities have no formal law enforcement presence. As of 2011, there were Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs) in only 74 of Alaska’s rural communities, and Tribal Police Officers (VPOs and TPOs), which are supervised by the Tribal governments, in 52 communities. More than 90 rural communities have no law

enforcement presence at all. In these rural Alaska Native communities, Native women often turn to their tribal courts to secure domestic violence protection orders because there is no one else that can provide immediate help.

Current law under VAWA does not provide sufficient local protection for victims of domestic violence in Alaska's Native communities. While we are grateful for the amendments to S.1925, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), offered by Senators Murkowski and Begich, which at least retain the status quo for Alaska's tribes, we strongly believe Alaska's villages need more in the way of practical solutions to this growing problem. Despite some of the worst statistics in the country on assault and violence against Native women, the only provisions included in the bill that specifically address the situation in Alaska are: (1) a baseline study of domestic violence in Alaskan villages; (2) a provision that would evaluate the merits of restarting the Rural Justice and Law Enforcement Commission; (3) federal money that would go to the state of Alaska for additional VPSOs; and (4) provisions to maintain the status quo in Alaska in terms of tribal jurisdiction.

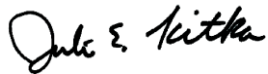
We would like to see more concrete measures in any VAWA reauthorization that would directly address the problem in Alaska. Our suggestions include the following:

1. Instead of giving the state of Alaska more money for the VPSO Program, that funding should be provided directly to the Regional Native non-profit tribal consortia that currently administer the VPSO program for the state. These organizations currently do not receive full reimbursement for administering the VPSO program and are thus limited in the other services they can provide to the victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The state of Alaska has basically relied on federal funding to address the issue of rural justice and law enforcement despite the fact that it is a state responsibility. The state should be held accountable for the protection of all of its citizens, and Alaska's tribes and Native nonprofits should be provided with more funding and resources to address the problem locally.
2. A pilot project should be included in the legislation that would authorize a select number of Alaska's tribes to enforce their civil tribal ordinances dealing with domestic violence, assault and child abuse, as well as with possession and importation of alcohol and illegal drugs. AFN has long supported legislation that would supplement state jurisdiction in Alaska's Native villages with federal and tribal resources to improve the quality of life in rural Alaska by reducing domestic violence against Native women and children. Such a program would arm tribal courts with the ability to stop violence at the early stages before the crimes escalate to aggravated assault, rape, and homicide. The only proven method of deterring domestic violence is to hold the offenders accountable in the community in which their crimes are committed. In Alaska, tribal courts are an essential partner for state law enforcement. They should be working together to protect the victims of domestic violence in Alaska. Yet, the state of Alaska continues to prevent Alaska's tribes from dealing with domestic violence locally, and permits

offenders of domestic and sexual violence to walk free without consequences for their actions. Improving law enforcement in the villages and empowering Alaska's tribes to address these issues is necessary to fill the gap in local authority, and ensure domestic safety for Native women in Alaska.

We urge your support for the Tribal provisions that were adopted by the Senate in S.1925, as well as for the specific provisions recommended above, that empower Alaska's villages to deal more effectively with domestic violence as you consider any measure to reauthorize VAWA. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Julie Kitka at [nevakitka@aol.com](mailto:nevakitka@aol.com) or June Zeitlin at [Zeitlin@civilrights.org](mailto:Zeitlin@civilrights.org).

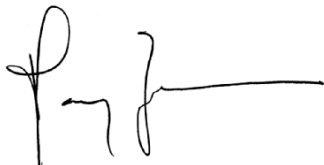
Sincerely,



Julie Kitka, President  
Alaska Federation of Natives



Wade Henderson, President & CEO  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights



Nancy Zirkin, Executive Vice President  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

Cc: House Leadership  
Senator Lisa Murkowski  
Senator Mark Begich