

TESTIMONY OF FLORENCE KARGI
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Oversight & Investigations Subcommittee
September 19, 2023

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Florence Kargi. I am the Regional Affairs Manager for Coastal Villages Region Fund (CVRF).

The Western Alaska Community Development Quota program (CDQ) gives Bering Sea villages a chance to invest in the fishing industry and use those earnings for economic development and related programs. Congress added the CDQ program to the Magnuson-Stevens Act in 1996.

Sixty-five villages with nearly 30,000 residents participate in the CDQ program through six non-profit CDQ Groups. CVRF is the largest of the six groups. We serve more than 9000 residents in 20 villages, including my hometown of Hooper Bay.

Growing up in western Alaska was hard. We had no running water in our home. We carried in water for washing dishes and filling the Danby Washer. Our toilet was a honey bucket – a 5-gallon bucket with a plastic bag inside and a toilet seat on top. When I turned 12, I got to empty the honey bucket outside along with my other chores. I thought this was normal in America.

Even today, only six of CVRF's twenty villages have piped water and sewer systems. However, CVRF was recently able to help one of our villages – Tununak – qualify for federal and state investment in a water system. We were able to demonstrate enough economic activity in the community to make the metrics work and justify this investment.

As a middle schooler, I looked up to the high schoolers in our village as role models. Unfortunately, the youth suicide rate in our region was many times higher than the national average. We were losing young people at an alarming rate. Again, I thought this was normal. Later, I realized I wanted something different for myself. CVRF gave me hope. I applied for and received a college scholarship in 2009 and began working there full time in 2013.

Today, CVRF employs hundreds of teenagers in our villages during the summer. We keep them active and engaged, learning job skills and Alaska Native cultural activities. We try to make a difference by addressing issues in our communities in ways that government programs often can't do.

I am so grateful for the leaders from our region who fought to create CDQ. Men like Harold Sparck, Louis Bunyan, Joe Paniyak, and others who didn't even speak English well showed up at government meetings and convinced stakeholders to support this important program. Today, thanks to them, CVRF owns and operates its own vessels in the Bering Sea. We sell seafood around the globe, earning \$75-\$90 million in revenue and \$8-\$10 million for our benefits programs every year.

CVRF offers many different benefits programs. We help our residents acquire and maintain equipment like ATV's, snowmachines (snowmobiles), skiffs, and outboard motors for commercial fishing and subsistence use.

We run mechanic/welder shops in our villages and we even provide warranty repairs on some Honda products. We also provide fuel oil to heat homes in late winter when people start to run out.

We have partnered with BIA and USDA on a housing program that included banks offering mortgages in our villages. And we buy salmon from other parts of Alaska for villages where the salmon runs are struggling.

We believe CVRF is the largest private sector employer in our villages.

The six CDQ groups all have different benefits programs that fit their regions. But we all get our resources from the Bering Sea.

CDQ depends on a healthy fishing industry and sustainable fisheries management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

The proposed Pribilof Islands Marine Sanctuary in the Bering Sea threatens sustainable fisheries management and the CDQ program. A single tribe in a village of less than 400 people could over-rule the North Pacific Fishery Management Council inside the proposed sanctuary. This is because the National Marine Sanctuaries Act says fishery management council decisions and even the National Standards in the Magnuson-Stevens Act will not apply if they are inconsistent with the goals and objectives of the sanctuary.

There are 65 CDQ villages and nearly 30,000 people who benefit from the CDQ program. Every CDQ village has a tribe and almost every resident is a Tribal Member. We struggle with extreme poverty, lack of infrastructure, and climate change. CDQ is one of the few bright spots helping address these challenges.

CVRF and three other CDQ groups, representing a strong majority of CDQ villages and residents, are on record opposing the proposed Pribilof Islands sanctuary. We urge NOAA to support the CDQ program and not designate a sanctuary in the Bering Sea.

Thank you.

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