

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY – INDIAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND INSULAR AFFAIRS**

**H.R. 2687, A BILL TO AMEND THE ALASKA NATIVE CLAIMS SETTLEMENT ACT
TO EXCLUDE CERTAIN PAYMENTS TO AGED, BLIND, OR DISABLED
ALASKA NATIVES OR DESCENDANTS OF ALASKA NATIVES
FROM BEING USED TO DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY FOR CERTAIN PROGRAMS,
AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES**

APRIL 30, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior’s (Department) views on H.R. 2687, a bill to amend the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) to exclude certain payments to aged, blind, or disabled Alaska Natives or descendants of Alaska Natives from being used to determine eligibility for certain need-based Federal programs.

H.R. 2687

Section 29 of the ANCSA (43 U.S.C § 1626) articulates how payments and grants made under ANCSA relate to other programs. Section 29(a) characterizes those payments and grants to be compensation for the extinguishment of claims to land which shall not be deemed to substitute for any governmental programs otherwise available to Native people of Alaska as citizens of the United States and the State of Alaska.

Grants and payments, in the context of Section 29, mean compensation received from a Native Corporation, which may include cash, stock, partnership interests, land or interests in land, or interest in a settlement trust. The ANCSA excludes such compensation from eligibility determination for programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, needs-based assistance programs authorized in the Social Security Act, and needs-based financial assistance or benefits from any other Federal program or Federally assisted program. H.R. 2687 would expand ANCSA’s exemption for interests in settlement trusts to also exempt amounts distributed from, or benefits provided by, a settlement trust to a Native or descendant of a Native who is an aged, blind, or disabled individual.

H.R. 2687 represents a commonsense approach to ensure Alaska Native citizens in need of assistance resources are not foreclosed from the Federal programs that are designed to help them. Nor, are they foreclosed from utilizing resources available at the Alaska Native community level – resources to which they are rightfully entitled as compensation for the extinguishment of Alaska Native land claims throughout the entire state of Alaska.

Conclusion

The Department supports H.R. 2687. This bill would increase ground-level support for individuals in need in Alaska Native communities while also improving cohesion between Federal, state, and local resources that are critical to supporting Alaska Natives in need.