



Written Testimony of

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of

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before the

United States House Committee on Natural Resources,

Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs

on

H.R. 2687, Legislation to Assist Alaska

Native Elders, Blind and Disabled

April 30, 2024

The ANCSA Regional Association expresses its sincere appreciation to Chairwoman Hageman and Ranking Member Leger Fernandez for allowing us this opportunity to submit written testimony on the record for the hearing on H.R. 2687.

About the ANCSA Regional Association

The ANCSA Regional Association (ARA) was founded in 1998 to represent Alaska Native regional corporations created pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA). ARA's membership is comprised of the twelve-land based Alaska Native regional corporations; representing over 160,000 Alaska Native shareholders. Our board is composed of the presidents and chief executive officers of our regional corporations. ARA's purpose is to promote and foster the continued growth and economic strength of the Alaska Native regional corporations on behalf of their Alaska Native shareholders and communities.

Testimony in Support of H.R. 2687 LEGISLATION TO ASSIST ALASKA NATIVE ELDERS, BLIND AND DISABLED

Chairwoman Hageman, Ranking Member Leger Fernandez, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the ANCSA Regional Association (ARA) Board of Directors, I am writing to you to express our strong support for H.R. 2687, legislation introduced by Rep. Mary Peltola, and cosponsored by Rep. Peter Stauber, that would have immediate and in some cases life-saving impacts for Alaska Native elders and disabled individuals. We have supported enactment of this legislation since the late Rep. Don Young introduced the first version of it more than four years ago. This legislation was a priority about which Mr. Young felt passionately and ARA is pleased that Rep. Peltola and her colleagues have carried forward this effort.

You have received testimony from the Old Harbor Corporation, Shee Atiká, Incorporated, and others detailing the fact that many elders and disabled Alaska Natives depend on both existing federal programs for housing, supplemental income, and nutritional assistance, as well as dividends from their Native Corporations and Elder Settlement Trusts. Counting these dividends and distributions as income for the purpose of federal benefits eligibility is an inaccurate reflection of how these funds are generated, and it harms a highly vulnerable population by artificially raising their income, potentially excluding them from essential services and programs such as housing assistance or food stamps. In some cases, elders have reported that they have had to stop receiving settlement trust distributions in order to maintain their eligibility for health care services at major Alaska hospitals.

H.R. 2687 would allow Alaska Natives who are Elders, blind, or disabled to exclude distributions received from an Alaska Native Settlement Trust from counting as income, for purposes of eligibility for federal assistance programs, and in doing so would immediately improve access to care and quality of life for thousands of our most vulnerable population. It is narrowly targeted and would be immediately effective in helping thousands of elder and disabled Alaska Natives meet their care, housing, and sustenance needs.

H.R. 2687 is also in keeping with the spirit of the law that Congress passed in 1988 authorizing Alaska Native corporations to establish settlement trusts, for the purpose of providing long-term benefits for our shareholders. The existing law, Section 29 of ANCSA (43 USC 1626) sets a clear precedent by allowing the first \$2,000 in Alaska Native corporate dividends to be excluded when considering eligibility for federal programs. Now, it's time to adapt this provision to the current times by extending the same principle from dividends to distributions from settlement trusts, which are an increasingly common way for Native Corporations to provide for their shareholders.

ANCSA created a new system for administering Native American lands, programs, and services in Alaska, but many of our elders and disabled people are still in need of assistance, and there are no moral or legal grounds for blocking them from the benefits that they are entitled to as American citizens. These elders and disabled shareholders largely cannot work, and many have chronic or pre-existing health conditions that make for not only expensive medical bills, but higher average costs of living due to prescriptions, specialized diets, home accommodations, and more.

No elder or disabled Alaska Native person should be forced to make the choice between accepting the distributions to which they are entitled, and still retaining access to medical care. They are the hearts and memories of our communities, and it is incumbent upon all of us to make sure they receive the care and benefits they deserve.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to move H.R. 2687 forward to enactment, and I offer ARA's support if there are any questions we can answer or materials we can provide to support this bill's passage.

Quyaana (Thank you),



Kim Reitmeier

President, ANCSA Regional Association