



July 2, 2019

Sent Via Electronic Mail

The Honorable Martin Heinrich  
303 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ben Ray Luján  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2323 Rayburn House Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Support for the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act of 2019

Dear Senators Heinrich and Congressman Luján:

On behalf of the Alaska Federation of Natives, I write to express our strong support for the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act of 2019.

Despite protections in current law, the illicit trade in tribes' tangible cultural heritage continues to pose a grave threat to our cultural survival. Our sacred and cultural items are illegally taken from our people, threatening the maintenance of our cultures and traditions and depriving us of the cultural legacy we seek to leave our future generations. Meanwhile, a lucrative black market in our cultural heritage thrives, and without explicit export restrictions many of our sacred and cultural items end up abroad. Once abroad, we have had very little success in efforts to bring them home.

AFN supports the STOP Act's goal of making it more difficult to export and easier for tribes to regain their cultural heritage from abroad. To that end, the STOP Act creates an explicit prohibition on exporting cultural heritage obtained in violation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), or the Antiquities Act, and it puts in place an export certification system to accompany the prohibition. Together, these measures make it possible for tribes to access other countries' domestic laws and law enforcement mechanisms to regain their cultural heritage, as certain countries, such as France, restrict import of cultural heritage illegally exported from a country that provides export certificates. They also make it possible for, and the STOP Act confirms the authority of, the President to enter into agreements under a 1970 international treaty in order to

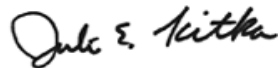
request from other countries return of tribes' cultural heritage.

We also support the STOP Act's increased penalties for violations of NAGPRA, and we support its provisions that facilitate more coordination within the federal government and between the federal government and tribes aimed at protecting tribes' cultural heritage and facilitating its return.

The STOP Act does not extend federal protections to cultural heritage that is not already protected, and thus it does not criminalize any currently legal domestic activity. Instead, it merely increases the deterrent effect of current law by imposing heightened penalties and provides that traffickers may not export their contraband.

We believe the STOP Act will help end illegal trafficking in tribes' cultural heritage and bring home our sacred and cultural items that have been separated from our communities for far too long.

Sincerely,  
ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES



Julie Kitka  
President