

TESTIMONY OF SOPHIE MINICH
VICE PRESIDENT OF ADMINISTRATION, COOK INLET REGION, INC.
SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

HUBZone ACT of 1997
P.L. 105-135

Good Morning Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for inviting me to participate in today's hearing. My name is Sophie Minich. I am an Alaskan Native of Athabascan descent. I am also the Vice President of Administration of Cook Inlet Region, Inc. (CIRI), an Alaskan Native Corporation based in Anchorage, Alaska, and a shareholder of CIRI. CIRI is one of the 12 Alaska Native Regional corporations established by Congress under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA). CIRI is owned by approximately 6,900 Alaska Native shareholders of Athabascan, Tlingit and Haida Indian, Inupiat and Yupik Eskimo and Aleut descent.

CIRI is recognized as one of the most successful corporations under ANCSA and is a critical part of Alaska's economy. CIRI's investments include nationwide businesses such as wireless telephone service, heavy equipment distribution, tourism, real estate, and construction services. CIRI also supports a number of non-profit organizations that provide educational scholarships, employment training and referral, health care, housing, and social services for CIRI shareholders and other Alaska Natives.

Today, I am here to testify on Public Law 105-135, Title VI, HUBZones Implementation. The idea behind the HUBZone empowerment contracting program is to foster the growth of rural areas afflicted with high unemployment and to encourage business growth and economic development for Native Americans. I applaud Congress for recognizing and wanting to assist American Natives in the development of our lands.

One of the major aspects of the HUBZone program is to make job opportunities available for Native Americans. This program may work well on Native lands in the lower 48 states; however, because of Alaska's uniqueness (vast areas of land, but with many Alaska Natives living in urban areas) the majority of Alaska Natives are currently ineligible from participating in many of the opportunities this program has to offer.

The lands which make Alaska Natives qualify for HUBZones are often far from the urban areas of Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau, where tens of thousands of Alaska Natives live. These areas are also where the Native Corporations' headquarters and principal offices are located. The requirement that the headquarters or principal office be located in the HUBZone would automatically disqualify the majority of the Alaska Native Corporations.

We understand it was not the intent of Congress to disqualify Alaska Natives from the program, but under the current law, many Alaska Native Corporations are disqualified from fully participating because of the location of their headquarters and principal offices.

Therefore, CIRI respectfully asks the Committee to make the above changes that I have recommended, specifically that the definition of *Indian lands* be expanded to include ANCSA lands. Finally, CIRI also recommends the prerequisite that the headquarters or principal offices be located in a HUBZone not be required for ANCSA Regional and Village Corporations.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to appear before you today. I appreciate the opportunity to be here to voice CIRI's support of the HUBZone program.