

Hearing  
Committee on Indian Affairs  
United States Senate  
July 20, 2000  
Testimony on S 2688  
Dr. William H. Wilson

Aloha nui kakou a pau (Heartfelt greetings to all) Hearing Chairman Senator Inouye and members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. I am Dr. William H. Wilson, chair of the academic division of Ka Haka Ula O Keelikolani College. Among my duties as chair is the outreach to Native American groups following our Hawaiian language survival nest and school models. It is therefore, indeed an honor to be invited to address you on this important issue and to have this opportunity to thank personally those who sponsored this bill.

I want to especially thank both Hawaii senators whose offices felt that the Aha Punana Leo and Ka Haka Ula O Keelikolani College effort in language revitalization was having an important national impact and that there was a need to support this type of education on a national level. I am very pleased to see that this bill includes ideas that were collected from all over the United States from groups that have been in contact with our Outreach Program as well as input from others. I am also pleased to hear the expert input from Dr. William Demmert, who I believe to be the most experienced Native American in the area of indigenous education, both on a national and international level. Furthermore, Dr. Demmert is one of the most important advocates for Native American education initiatives anywhere. Finally, I want to acknowledge the important work that is occurring at the Alaska Native Language Center of the University of Alaska, which is the most developed center in the United States working to collect and preserve Native American languages. Their willingness to provide direction and support to language survival schools who will need to also collect and preserve their languages is very important. I think that part of the reason that there are more Native American language survival schools developing in Alaska than in any part of the nation except Hawaii, is because of the excellent dictionaries, lexicons, grammars and other resource materials that are being developed at the Center for Alaska languages.

I think that Hawaii and Alaska can work as a good team to assist the entire country, and that through our partnership we can also include and coordinate other important resource centers throughout the country as well. Technology makes it possible for us to reach the entire world in seconds. For those who will visit our centers, and we expect many such visitors, our very distance and distinctive geography are assets. While flying to Hawaii and Alaska now can be accomplished in a few hours, visitors must still change their orientation to understand how truly distinctive Native American Language Survival Nests and Schools are. These schools are very different from the type of bilingual programs and Native American languages as enrichment/elective courses that are most common in the United States.

I have also suggested a few minor wording changes collected from various people that I have talked to since the bill was introduced. I will provide these to your committee staff. All of

these wording changes are minor rather than substantive. They are all in keeping with what I understand to be the purpose and intent of this bill, that is to fund truly innovative programs that are taught totally or nearly totally through Native American languages in accordance with the unique status of Native American languages under United States law.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify strongly in favor of this bill.

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