

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 25, 2014

The Honorable Sean Parnell
Governor
State of Alaska
P.O Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

Dear Governor Parnell:

I write today regarding Alaska village public safety. As we've discussed before, the public safety problems facing rural Alaska villages are so serious they merit nothing less than an "all of the above approach" if we are truly going to improve the lives of families. In my opinion this includes enhancing local and tribal jurisdiction over crimes involving domestic violence and its many risk factors.

On April 2, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs will hold a legislative hearing on S. 1474, the *Alaska Safe Families and Villages Act*, which I reintroduced last fall with Senator Murkowski as a co-sponsor. I welcome the State of Alaska's support for this bill, and urge you and Attorney General Michael Geraghty to reconsider the State's opposition to the repeal of Section 910 in the *Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)*. I met with AG Geraghty recently and we had a frank discussion about that provision, which as you know prohibits tribes in Alaska from participating in the expanded jurisdiction over non-members granted by VAWA.

In addition, I am informing you of my intent to offer amendments to strengthen the current bill language at the request of the Alaska Federation of Natives and other groups. The purpose of S. 1474 in its current form is to improve the delivery of justice in Alaska Native villages, by encouraging the State of Alaska and federally recognized tribes to enter into intergovernmental agreements relating to the enforcement and adjudication of State laws dealing with drug and alcohol offenses. It is my understanding the State has drafted intergovernmental agreements and is currently negotiating with several tribal entities to this effect. I see this as forward progress and recognize the potential for such agreements to result in meaningful, on-the-ground results. However, if we are going to pursue an "all of the above approach" this also means supporting Alaska tribes in the enforcement and adjudication of tribal laws in remote Alaska Native villages.

The Honorable Sean Parnell

March 25, 2014

Page 2

My amendments to S. 1474 would authorize Alaska tribes that are eligible and apply for the Alaska Safe Families and Villages Self Governance Tribal Law Project to exercise jurisdiction concurrent with—but not reliant on—State jurisdiction. Tribes would be allowed to handle matters relating to child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, and drug offenses—consistent with any local option laws in effect in the local community. I believe the way to truly show respect to the people and families of rural Alaska, is by trusting them with the authority to take responsibility for public safety in their communities.

I commend you for launching a positive campaign and dialogue with the *Real Alaskans Choose Respect* effort. As Alaskans, we too gather together in Washington, D.C., each March to participate in the statewide effort you initiated. I certainly agree that as statewide leaders we must ask all Alaskans to choose respect if we want to end the cycle of domestic violence and sexual assault. However, as statewide leaders, we also must choose to solve rural public safety problems and make tough decisions about greater local control.

Your effort to enhance funding for Village Public Safety Officers, domestic violence shelters, and victim services certainly is important—but not a complete solution. A key missing component is establishing clear local and tribal jurisdiction. There is an established record and long narrative in Alaska's history that points to the lack of readily available state law enforcement and judicial systems, as key contributors to the public safety problems plaguing rural villages, which is still true today. We've suffered these problems long enough. How many national reports documenting horrific conditions in rural villages must we withstand before we choose to solve the local and tribal jurisdiction issues? Alaska villages should be supported in carrying out local, culturally relevant solutions to effectively provide law enforcement in villages with access to swift, local judicial proceedings.

Together we as statewide leaders can change the public safety paradigm in Alaska and save lives. We must all be accountable to these staggering conditions. Alaska's First Peoples and our entire state deserve our best efforts. I continue my willingness to work with you and your administration on this important priority.

Sincerely,



Mark Begich
United States Senator

CC: Senator Lisa Murkowski
Congressman Don Young
Ms. Julie Kitka, AFN President
Ms. Anna Hoffman, AFN Co-Chair
Ms. Tara Sweeney, AFN Co-Chair
Attorney General Michael Geraghty, State of Alaska