

Testimony of York Mendenhall, Native Village of Kotzebue

GOOD AFTERNOON, LADIES AND GENTLEMAN. I'D LIKE TO THANK THE CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS FOR COMING TO KOTZEBUE TO HEAR OUR VIEWS ON JUSTICE IN RURAL ALASKA. AS A SOVEREIGN TRIBE, THE NATIVE VILLAGE OF KOTZEBUE HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO ACT IN THE BEST INTEREST OF OUR MORE THAN 2,500 TRIBAL MEMBERS LIVING IN AND OUT SIDE OF OUR VILLAGE – THAT MEANS PROVIDING SPECIFIC SERVICES SUCH AS CHILD PROTECTION AS WELL AS ADDRESSING LARGER ISSUES SUCH AS ENSURING THE WELL BEING OF OUR PEOPLE.

WE ARE EXAMINING THE POSSIBILITY OF CREATING A TRIBAL COURT IN KOTZEBUE, TO ADDRESS ISSUES SUCH AS INDIAN CHILD WELFARE CASES, CUSTOMARY ADOPTIONS, DISORDERLY CONDUCT AND THE ISSUE OF MINOR JUVENILE OFFENSES. WE BELIEVE IT'S IMPORTANT THAT THE STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RECOGNIZE OUR INHERENT AUTHORITY OVER TRIBAL AFFAIRS.

WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO EMPOWER OUR VILLAGE AND PEOPLE WHICH MEANS BEING APART OF THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS THAT AFFECTS JUSTICE AND LAW IN OUR VILLAGE.

WE STRONGLY OPPOSE ANY FORM OF REGIONALIZATION. WE RESPECTFULLY REQUEST PRIOR TO SUBMITTING YOUR FINDINGS AND OR RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ALASKA LEGISLATIVE BODY AND CONGRESS THAT YOU ALLOW US AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW AND PROVIDE INPUT PRIOR TO YOUR SUBMISSION.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO BEING A PART OF THE PROCESS.

2/24/05