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“Alaska Rural Justice”

Good morning to all of you. First of all, I would like to introduce myself, my name is Mike Williams, currently President of Rural CAP. I am from a small community of Akiak on the banks of the Kuskokwim River. I have been involved with many boards and commissions throughout my short lifetime. It has been a great honor to serve my People so we can have the quality of life that we all deserve.

Today, I am speaking for the Rural CAP. It is an organization that has made a big difference in the daily lives in Rural Alaska. Many of our communities are living in third world conditions while we are the richest state in the union. Rural CAP has a defined goal to get rid of being dependant and become economically self sufficient in each community throughout Alaska. I think that is a goal for all of us here in Alaska.

We are all concerned of the problems that exist in each of our communities. As a Mental Health and Substance abuse counselor in our area, I have seen so much destruction of our young people as well our elders. It all stems from availability of alcohol, even though many of the villages are “dry” communities, our regional hubs are damp. Akiak is a dry village but you can possess alcohol in you own home. That makes it very difficult to control how it is being brought into our community. One of the problems has been enforcement. We have had lack of trained police officers and we have had the VPO's at \$10.00, 2 hours a day at times due to lack of funding. We have had VPSO's but they had lack of housing in the community and eventually burnt out due to long hours of work. We have had no jail facility for a long time, and when we got one, the jail burned down due to unknown reason. So the solution seems to be that we need at least two fully trained, certified police officers with all the resources that they need, vehicles, jail, enforcement of local laws, support from Tribal councils, adequate pay and benefits. The communities that are larger, probably need more officers.

In order for the Villages to be empowered to handle issues, they need fully educated, trained, organized Tribal Courts. Each community has a unique way of handling issues that affect individuals and families. We need to make sure that we continue to have workshops for capacity building to have strong Tribal Courts. Many of the minor criminal matters and others can be handled at the local level.

Since Alcohol is the main problem, we need to completely out law it (completely dry) areas or regions and not allow the regional hubs to remain damp, like in the case of Bethel. Otherwise, we need to have controlled bars or liquor stores. Bootlegging is the major problem in our communities. There is no middle ground for this. We need to increase treatment and prevention programs. Rural CAP has an annual providers conference that has been very successful in bringing the awareness in areas of Sobriety

and wellness. It is held in areas throughout Alaska and is making an impact. We have a lot of sobriety and wellness activities going on now but we need more funding to continue those activities.

We need to revive our languages and cultures throughout the communities in Alaska. I really think that assimilation policies have not worked in this country, but to revive these will make sure that our young people will survive into the future with all the knowledge of our Peoples' way of life. Elders will play a big part in this effort. Many of them remain idle in the communities. They need to be utilized in the educational systems.

I believe that over 200 communities throughout Alaska have unique problems and solutions that we need to respect and support their efforts. There is no one single answer to the problem.

I am enclosing, for the record, the copy of Village Voices that covered my story and the need for positive Tribal/State relations in orders to best serve our citizens. Quyana cakneq!