

Alaska State Legislature

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Special Committee on Arctic, Economic Development,
and Tourism, Chair
Resources Committee, Vice Chair
Community and Regional Affairs Committee
Special Committee on Energy

Representative Dean Westlake Sponsor Statement

House Bill 78 "Indigenous Peoples Day"

This bill establishes the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples Day. Federally, the second Monday in October is Columbus Day. In our Alaskan context it is fitting that this day should also honor the first people of our state and of the Americas. In 2015 and 2016 Governor Walker proclaimed Indigenous Peoples Day as a one year observance. This bill establishes Indigenous Peoples Day as a yearly holiday that every Alaskan can be proud to celebrate.

Indigenous people are an integral part of the spiritual, cultural, linguistic, scientific and historical fabric of the State of Alaska and the Americas at large. We as a state recognize the unique contributions of Indigenous people as a whole, and of individual Alaska Natives for their role in making the state what it is today.

Alaska Native people have exercised agency in the development of the current systems of land management and traditional use of fish and game. Leaders like Shgúndi William Paul, Nanauq Eben Hopson, Kaaxgal.aat Elizabeth Peratrovich, Iggiagruk Willie Hensley and Dits'itnaan Katie John all worked within the legal system to establish a better and more just state for all Alaskans.

Alaska Native people have also contributed to the cultural life of Alaska. Through literature, both oral and written as well as in the visual arts, Alaska Native people have left an indelible mark on the state. Through this bill we recognize the contributions of the philosophers and teachers Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley, the spiritual teacher Kaajaḡwtí Walter Sobeloff, the poet and scholar Keixwnéi Nora Marks Dauenhauer, the elders who have retained their languages, and passed on their culture, and the parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles who teach their children what it means to be an indigenous person. This day of recognition also acknowledges the many artists, some whose names are unrecorded, whose work is used in ceremony and tribal custom—as well as respected and admired in world class museums and private collections.

Through this action, Alaska joins a growing number of states, cities and tribes that have adopted the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples Day.