

ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES



PRESIDENT'S REPORT — APRIL 2015



Journalists gather for the April 16 press conference in the capitol building.



Gov. Walker: "This is very important to me. What's good for Alaska Native children is good for all children. What's good for Alaska's children is good for Alaska."



Commissioner Valerie Davidson explains why the adoption process is very difficult in rural communities.

Native Child Adoption Emergency Regulations

AFN staff worked closely with Governor Bill Walker and his administration to develop emergency regulations dealing with the adoption process for Alaska Native children. The new regulations were signed into law on April 15.

At a well-attended press conference in Juneau on April 16, Governor Walker said, "The emergency regulations are the first step. The second step is we introduce legislation, statutory changes that will (ensure) that Native children are going to Native families." He acknowledged that such legislation will not make it through the current session.

Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Commissioner Valerie Davidson explained that under the Indian Child Welfare Act, or ICWA, Native families receive preference in adoption cases. But as it stands now, they have to exercise that right through prescribed application notices and legal proceedings.

That is extremely difficult in villages where there are often no attorneys. Davidson conveyed just how challenging the process is by asking reporters a question in Yup'ik. In the silence that followed Davidson said, "I asked you in Yup'ik, 'If you're a person who wants to step forward, come now. Now is the time. Now is the only time you can do that.' That's what families face in Alaska every day."

Under the emergency regulations, which are effective immediately, individuals with ICWA preference would be able to express their intent to adopt a child in need in less formal ways. They could do it in person, over the phone, by post, or even e-mail. The administration, with assistance from AFN, has also drafted a bill that would solidify those rules into statute. If the legislation passes next year, it would make the policy more likely to hold in future administrations.

AFN President Julie Kitka said, "I want to recognize Governor Walker and his administration's willingness to partner with the Alaska Native community. I'm so proud of the efforts of the team because it's real. It impacts children in our state today."

Native Child Adoption Regulations (Cont'd.)

"It's a complex issue with many legal aspects," Kitka added. "Our focus has been to pay attention to what is in the best interest of the children and make sure that families are at the forefront. The emergency regulations create a foundation to move forward, with the state working with Alaska's tribes to ensure the Indian Child Welfare Act remains a vital and meaningful protection for Native children."

SBA Proposes Changes To Mentor-Protégé Program

The Small Business Administration issued the second of two long-awaited announcements in February 2015, proposing changes to its Mentor-Protégé Program and soliciting public comments on its proposed actions. The proposed rule includes specific changes for the tribal 8(a) program, such as further defining shared administrative services, imposing limitations on management of such 8(a) entities, and clarifying the process for changing a concern's primary NAICS code, as well as changes to existing provisions for joint venture relationships within the 8(a) program.

In response to AFN's concerns over the lack of tribal consultations preceding the proposed rule, the SBA held two tribal consultations and extended the comment period to mid-May 2015.

AFN Convention

The Convention Committee continues its evaluation of the 2014 Convention. The form can be filled out on-line: [click here](#).

Subsistence

NPFMC — The AFN Legislative & Litigation Committee passed a resolution urging the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) to reduce salmon bycatch. The NPFMC met in Anchorage the week of April 6 and voted to reduce bycatch caps when an index of Chinook salmon is below a designated threshold. The Council also adopted a range of management measures including incorporating chum salmon into existing incentive plan agreements, tools to facilitate flexibility for the pollock fleet, and more stringent incentive plan provisions.

State Board of Fisheries — The State Legislature voted 29-30 against confirming Board of Fisheries appointee Robert Ruffner. Criticisms during the confirmation session were aimed at Ruffner's suitability for supposed allegiance to the commercial fishing industry and lack of representation of the Anchorage personal use and dipnetting user base.

Native Appointees

Ten Alaska Native nominees to state boards and commissions, including two AFN Board members, were unanimously confirmed by legislators on April 19. Congratulations to all on these well-deserved appointments!

Sheri Buretta (AFN Board Member)—University of Alaska Board of Regents

Valerie Davidson—Commissioner, Dept. of Health and Social Services

Kip Fanning—Board of Game

Craig Fleener—Successor to Lieutenant Governor

Orville Huntington (former AFN board member)—Board of Fisheries

April 26th - 2nd Annual Honoring Our Children Day

The 2014 inaugural Honoring Our Children Day event was focused on communities pulling together to honor their children. For this year, the emphasis shifted to individuals and families, using April 26 as a time to honor, love, and share quality time with kids. No matter how people chose to participate, the goal of Honoring Our Children Day is to bring us together so that we grow strong, culturally connected, empowered and loved children who are ready to lead us into the future.

