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Hearing before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs  
on S. 575, a bill to amend the Native American Languages Act  
to Provide Support of Native American Language Survival Schools  
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Aloha nui kakou a pau (Heartfelt greetings to all) Chairman Campbell and members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. I am Dr. William H. Wilson, chair of the academic division of Ka Haka Ula O Keelikolani College. Among my duties as chair is the outreach to Native American groups following our Hawaiian language nest and survival school models. It is therefore, indeed an honor to be invited to address you on this important issue and to have this opportunity to thank personally those who sponsored this bill.

I want to especially thank the Committee for its determination that the Aha Punana Leo and Ka Haka Ula O Keelikolani College Consortium effort in language revitalization was having an important national impact and that there was a need for a federally funded program to develop this type of education on a national level. I fully support working with the Piegan Institute and Alaska Native Language Centers to provide special assistance to the many communities throughout the United States who seek to develop language nests and survival schools as a means to revitalize their languages.

Language Nests and Language Survival Schools represent a new level of human rights for Native Americans. Essentially what these schools offer Native Americans is a choice - a choice that already exists for non-indigenous immigrant groups. That choice is for schooling for their children through their own traditional language. Immigrants have available to them education for their children through their traditional languages back in their countries of origin to which they can send their children for extended stays. For Native Americans, the United States is the country of origin. Native American Language Nests and Native American Language Survival Schools need to be developed here in our country.

Direction in developing these language nests and language survival schools is a major need. Most Native American languages have not had a history of being used extensively as media of education in the types of schools available to other peoples throughout the world. Furthermore the educational establishment at both the federal and state level, has a long history of repressing Native American languages. Such repression has been so pervasive and institutionalized that it

often remains unnoticed by those in standard educational institutions who sincerely want to assist Native American communities. Thus barriers are erected to those who wish to establish language nests and language survival schools without those who erecting the barriers realizing the negative effects of their actions.

There are a number of false but firmly planted beliefs of the educational establishment in the United States that work against implementing Native American language nests and Native American language survival schools.

For example, the educational establishment believes that the more English is used in school the more skilled indigenous students will be in using English. World wide, the actual evidence from indigenous language survival schools is that even when the study of English is reduced to a one hour per day English language Arts class from grade 5 through 12, indigenous students reach the same level of fluency and literacy in English (or the country's dominant language) as indigenous children enrolled in schools taught entirely through English. (The reason for language survival student success in English relate to exposure to use of English through the mass media and other uses external to the classroom. In addition the cognitive and psychological advantages of children taught through their traditional indigenous language has positive effects on academic achievement including in their study of English. Indigenous children educated in a school where their language is not the language of instruction do not receive these cognitive and psychological advantages)

The educational establishment not infrequently assumes that indigenous languages are somehow incapable of being used to discuss international academic content. They seldom consider that academic content is being taught throughout the world in a variety of languages, some of which are quite small and were as recently as the 19th and 20th centuries considered inferior for the teaching of academic subjects. Note for example Japanese, Hebrew, Korean, and Finnish - none of which were used in modern Western style education two hundred years ago. Further note that the students educated in these small languages attend United States colleges after high school graduation where they not infrequently outperform students from the general American population. Similar high academic results are occurring with graduates of language survival schools world wide. We have evidence for it among our own Hawaiian language survival school students.

The educational establishment tends to take Native American languages for granted as part of Native American home and community life and assume that minimal attention in the school will keep them alive. This is totally false. The school has taken a major portion of the most formative years of Native American children away from the Native American community. The school must therefore be a major part of the Native American language enculturation process for Native American languages to survive. And in today's globalized society, every Native American language is severely endangered needing special and intense attention.

In even the most remote Native American communities and homes there is regular exposure to English mass media and a back and forth flow of relatives who live outside the traditional home area in total English speaking areas. Frequently this interaction brings a habit of only using English right into the heartland of an indigenous people. Add to this compulsory education which takes up a huge part of the formative years of children and you have a recipe for rapid and complete replacement of Native American languages and cultures with English. Native American language nests and survival schools can reverse the current trend to extinction and have already done so with positive academic results. And these results include a balanced and highly skilled knowledge of both the traditional Native American language and English.

Within the educational establishment, it is usually considered highly supportive of indigenous languages to provide education through a mixture of the indigenous language and English until grade 3 (8 years of age.) In actual fact, this transition at grade 3 model is not an indigenous language survival model, but a bilingual immigrant assimilation model simply applied without consideration to major differences between immigrant and indigenous minorities. When bilingual immigrant models are applied to Native American languages, the result is continued weakening of the Native American language with no special benefit to English fluency. The "keep the Native American language in lower elementary school" model cannot produce a student with balanced and highly developed fluency in both English and the Native American language upon graduation from high school. The Native American language will be weak and the student will likely psychologically associate the Native American identity with lower status and lower academics.

Linguists have done studies on the language retention of children who have been removed from use of their traditional language. The children studied - often adoptees from Korea or Russia - have been removed from an environment where they speak only their own language at home and with peers and where they have gone to day care or elementary school solely in their traditional language. The result is that such children usually forget their original language completely if they have no further exposure in the actual use of their original language. Even with children as old as eight - there can be total loss of the original language. In children older than 8, some knowledge of the language remains but it tends to atrophy and not develop further to the full adult uses that mark a true fluent speaker rather than a semi-speaker.

Native Americans who have gone to boarding schools from a very early age and who then had no opportunity to use their languages again, can vouch for the affect of putting a child in an educational environment where his or her traditional language is fully eliminated. It is only when the language is strongly reinforced in the community by elders and parents who know no English that Native American languages have survived the boarding school experience. But the days when a community has a large number of elders and parents who speak no English are close to ending, if not already long ended, for most Native American communities. For languages to survive in today's world where Native American communities are no longer isolated, Native American communities need to be more proactive in the use of their language to produce a balanced high school graduate totally fluent in both their

traditional language and English. And this means using the language as a medium of education in language survival schools - at least for a portion of the community's youth.

The experience of indigenous language survival schools worldwide is that the amount of time and number of years spent on the indigenous language is key to not only developing skills in actual use of the language, but in also developing a positive attitude that will lead to actual use of the language in contemporary life. Half the day taught through the language to middle school is seen as a basic minimum to reach an ability in the indigenous language where actual use can occur. However, with only half a day, the indigenous language fluency will be very much less than English fluency.

Once they see they have the success of the language survival school model, communities serious about language revitalization, often want to move half day programs on to full day programs and go on to high school. Remember again, that the students graduating from such full day language survival schools speak, read, and write English as well as their peers in schools that are taught entirely in English. The strength of the full day model is that it produces higher indigenous language use. And even in these preschool to grade 12 total indigenous language medium schools, fluency tends to initially be higher in English than in the indigenous language. It is not until the second generation - when the products of language survival schools have their own children and a portion of them raise their children speaking the traditional language that you begin to reach a situation of true balance between English and the traditional language. Keeping that balance requires the community to develop experts in language maintenance and revitalization for the contemporary world. And with that knowledge students can be taught additional languages as well without negatively impacting on Native American or English fluency. The small countries of Europe such as Denmark and the Netherlands have educational experts who are very skilled in developing such balance and assuring that all students graduate from their schools with high fluency in three and sometimes even more languages. These are the models that Ka Haka Ula O Keelikolani College keeps abreast of in developing support for our language nest and language survival school training.

There are many variations on the general survival school model that take into account unique cultural features of different indigenous languages, their relationships with other languages as written and unwritten media of education, and their stages of revitalization. There are also many preliminary steps toward developing language nests and language survival schools. Communities may not be ready for the language nest and language survival school models and need to focus their efforts on enrichment and partial learning programs funded through other sources. Our Hawaiian programs also went through these stages of development before we opened our first language nest.

Those groups seeking to establish language nests and language revitalization schools need assistance in addressing the model. They also need assistance in dealing with the lingering affects of past repression on their own thinking and the thinking of others in their communities. Every successful language nest and language survival program that I have ever heard of in the world has had to face major challenges from both within their community and outside it. These challenges tend to be based on misconceptions

that the languages are inferior to English, that the language survival schools deprive the children of English, that the children do not learn academic content in language survival schools, and that the language survival schools are ruining the language by using it in a new context. Of course, such attacks are not based on any real research in language survival schools, but they are especially damaging when a school is just starting and cannot defend itself with its own data. These lingering negative attitudes have recently been inflamed by the No Child Left Behind Act which has not been properly accommodated to U.S. policy relative to Native American languages.

We have with us today, Mr. Hololapaenaenaokona Hoopai. Mr. Hoopai is an example of a language survival school student. He graduates this June from Ke Kula O Nawahiokalaniopuu. Nawahiokalaniopuu is a language nest through grade 12 laboratory school affiliated with the English medium Hilo High School. The laboratory school, however, is conducted in Hawaiian with English introduced in grade 5.

Mr. Hoopai is the top ranked student of a class of over two hundred at Hilo High School and has been chosen valedictorian. He has also been accepted to Stanford University with a scholarship from the University. Mr. Hoopai is a fine example of the students who have graduated from Hawaiian language survival schools. Of a total of some 100 students who in the past five years have completed Hawaiian language survival school education through grade 12, about 80% were accepted to college with Mr. Hoopai being the second accepted to Stanford. There have been no drop outs in the program, but some students have transferred to other schools, often private schools. My understanding is that these students have also done well when they transfer to these English medium schools.

At Ke Kula O Nawahiokalaniopuu, Mr. Hoopai has had a college preparatory program provided him through Hawaiian by Hawaiian speaking teachers, every single one of whom grew up speaking primarily English. The teachers had to learn Hawaiian from the resources left behind by elders. They have had to revive Hawaiian chanting and oratory and seek out traditional Hawaiian literature.

The focus on using Hawaiian at the Hawaiian language survival school does not mean that the students in the school are denied education in English. They learn classical Hawaiian epic literature and also study classical English literature including Shakespeare and Chaucer. They study math and science - a strength of Mr. Hoopai - but also study the application of math and science to the Hawaiian subsistence culture of Hawaiian elders centered around taro cultivation, pig husbandry and fishing. These subsistence activities are included at the school with a series of gardens and a variety of animals. While Mr. Hoopai's education includes newly coined words for science it also includes ancient terminology for a lifestyle that is today lived only by a few

Hawaiians, but which is at the core of Native Hawaiian values and literature. A parallel in Anglo-American culture is the role that learning about the historical periods of that culture such as the lives of the pioneers who lived in log cabins and grew their own food and the ranches of the West with their cattle centered culture.

While providing for an education about different historical periods of Hawaiian culture, different periods of English language and culture, and the international skills of mathematics and science, the school seeks as its primary mission the instillation of a Hawaiian maui or life force that will guide these students throughout their lives. How to use the language in daily life is but part of this maui - an overall Native Hawaiian world view from which to live ones life.

Developing such a system of education is quite a challenge - it takes time and long term commitment. But it is possible and groups with less language and culture resources than many Native American peoples have seen success in pursuing language nests and language survival schools. S 575 is a vehicle for the United States government to provide support for those who have made a commitment to actualize the human rights ideals of the Native American Languages Act. I very much appreciate the introduction of this bill and urge its passage.