



**TANANA CHIEFS CONFERENCE
REMARKS FOR ROUNDTABLE WITH SENATOR MURKOWSKI
AUGUST 14TH, 2025**

I. Introduction: Who We Are & What We Face

- The Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) represents 42 Tribal communities, including 37 federally recognized Tribes, across Alaska's Interior.
- We serve 18,000 Alaska Natives, many in remote villages only accessible by plane or boat.
- Our people face persistent challenges: high cost of living, isolation, and lack of basic infrastructure—especially around food access.
- Stores with fresh food are few and far between. Even where stores exist, healthy food is unaffordable—and our Yukon River salmon runs have collapsed, eliminating a key traditional food source.
- Hunting can't fill the gap—outside pressure and climate shifts reduce what our communities can sustainably harvest.

II. Current Crisis: Food Insecurity and the SNAP Backlog

- Families in our region now face a dual crisis: worsening food insecurity and an ongoing SNAP backlog.
- SNAP applications are delayed by weeks or months, and the process is not accessible to people in remote villages:
 - Long hold times, dropped calls, no reliable phones.
 - Delayed or lost mail due to weather and poor infrastructure.
 - Lack of coordination between programs like SNAP and TANF.
- The impact is severe: Families go hungry while waiting for aid.
- Example from Fort Yukon: A client said there was “not enough for even a mouse to get scraps” in his home while SNAP delays dragged on.
- TCC and Tribes fill the gaps—with food vouchers, outreach events, and one-time stipends—but this is not sustainable.
- TCC has also been doing annual salmon distributions. We have spent over \$1 million and this year will spend \$600k to ensure tribal members have salmon in the freezer to get through the winter month.

III. The Tribal Solution: Capacity, Experience & Self-Governance

- Tribes already administer federal programs effectively—like TANF, LIHEAP, Head Start, and Childcare—with deep knowledge of our communities.
- We streamline access through “one-stop-shop” service centers that offer wraparound support: employment, training, health, food, and more.

- TCC’s 477 Plan allows us to consolidate grants, removing red tape and improving outcomes for families.
- Tribal caseworkers live in the communities they serve—they know the barriers and can proactively advocate, troubleshoot, and support clients holistically.
- We are already doing the work—what we lack is the authority to manage SNAP directly.

IV. Direct SNAP Administration by Tribes

- We urge direct federal funding for Tribes to administer SNAP, as is done with other programs and advocate for all federal funding to not be routed through states or agencies.
- This would:
 - Honor tribal self-determination and federal trust responsibility.
 - Reduce duplication and administrative burden on both Tribes and federal agencies.
 - Improve access and timeliness of services for the people who need them most.
- This aligns with long-standing federal policy and recent efforts across HHS to streamline funding and improve efficiency. This is an opportunity to significantly reduce administrative burdens for both federal agencies and tribal organizations, so we can use more resources toward providing critical services to our tribal members.
- Direct funding to Tribes empowers us to design programs that fit our unique community and family needs.
- Empowering Tribes to lead will ensure every dollar reaches the community faster, more respectfully, and more effectively.
- Alaska Native families should not go hungry while systems fail—let Tribes lead the solution.