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Field Hearing on Overcrowded Housing and the Impacts on American Indians and Alaska  
Natives.  
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It is my distinct honor to welcome you to our homeland, Saint Lawrence Island. My name is Delbert Pungowiyi and I serve as the President of the Native Village of Savoonga. Our tribe serves roughly 900 tribal members, with our population continuing to grow with each generation. I was born in 1959, the same year that Alaska established Statehood with the United States. There was no electricity back then, and people still used dog teams. I was raised by my grandparents, who instilled in me our ancestral ways.

We have governed ourselves on Saint Lawrence Island for over 10,000 years. The location of our island in the Bering Strait provides access to marine resources including whales, walrus, and seals that provide not only sustenance and food security, but give great meaning and relevance to where we live. The wealth of our ocean and lands is immeasurable in economic terms. Our way of life is governed according to the laws of our creator of how we are to live on this earth. We are raised to take nothing more, then what mother earth provides us for sustenance.

Yet history has delivered upon us a complex reality. The presence of the military during the Cold War on our Island, as well as failed federal Indian policies of assimilation from a generation past has delivered a complex governance arrangement between our lands as managed by our corporation and society as governed by the tribe. Historical trauma imposed by systematic changes to our way of life, and lack of ability to comprehensive govern ourselves has left our community with rates of substance abuse that impact both the fundamental health of our community and economic productivity. It is from the lens of these challenges that we must understand and acknowledge in order to identify and create pathways to homeownership.

You will hear today several perspectives, from our educators, and health providers the crisis situation our families face -a crisis that has remained silent for far too long. Let me use this opportunity however to speak generally for those of us living in rural Alaska. In January 2017 the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco published a rural homeownership guide that highlighted the most overcrowded regions in rural Alaska face a rate 12 times the national average and a \$2 billion capital need for urgent improvements to existing homes. While we are extremely thankful for the work of Bering Strait Regional Housing Authority, we recognize that housing authorities in Alaska are vastly underfunded to meet the demands they face.

The 20 federally recognized tribes of the Bering Strait region have prioritized addressing the housing crisis our communities face. The Association of Alaska Housing Authorities reported in a 2014 study that over 20% of homes in our region are overcrowded with multiple families living under one roof. The rate of overcrowding here in Savoonga is the highest of any census area at 61%. Over 50% of our population lives below the federal poverty line, according to the American Community Survey's United States Census.

In 2015, we faced an economic disaster, as declared by the State of Alaska. With increasing changes to the Arctic climate and a lack of stable sea ice, our hunters were left without any access to our main food source provided by the spring walrus migration. The lack of access to walrus created a food security crisis and we are thankful the State of Alaska declared an economic disaster. The declaration did not result in any meaningful assistance to our starving families, however we are thankful some food provisions were provided. This unfortunate event allowed the tribe to determine that 75 families in our community face overcrowding in the home.

The state of overcrowding in our homes are felt in pervasive ways that impact the very will to live for every generation within a home. The level of hopelessness and despair has left us with devastating social consequences of substance abuse, and suicide. I am not proud to report that the State of Alaska experiences one of the highest rates of suicide in the United States. We must work to identify the magnitude of need for home investment on Saint Lawrence Island, and establish pathways for our young families. Let us hope this is the beginning of creating new opportunity. New opportunity and pathways for the next generation. Our purpose and will to live is within our way of life.

We recognize that it will take the collective action of multiple organization both locally and regionally as well as an examination of the barriers and programs that define our reality on the island. I strongly encourage that we examine the policies and programs that will reduce the cost of raw materials for home construction, invest in workforce development and increase youth employment, as well as advance place-based and culturally relevant design of our homes. I would like to make the following recommendations:

- Our tribe, as the primary government responsible for the well-being of our members has barely enough base funding to operate day to day. The BIA's small and needy tribe allocation must be appropriated at \$300,000 adjusted with the consumer price index.
- Oversight and reform of the bypass mail program to improve the delivery of goods to St. Lawrence Island. While we appreciate the support of the program, an evaluation of logistics routes (hub to village) is absolutely necessary. Prior to the program direct cargo flights landed here in Savoonga, and it deliver a snow machine or four wheeler it roughly cost \$300. As cargo was rerouted to Nome, we experienced the increase in costs: \$300 to Nome; and an additional \$650 from Nome to Savoonga. Re-evaluating the bypass mail program will go a long way in reducing the cost of goods to our communities. We

strongly urge you to convene a private sector dialogue to reduce the cost of goods to rural communities.

- Create a multi-pronged strategy to improve and weatherize existing housing stock. Encourage Ruralcap to spend more funding in rural Alaska.
- We are known for our harsh climate conditions, with hurricane force winds. Our homes must be designed to suit our environment. The homes of our ancestors were completely weather proof. They "lived under the skin of our mother." As we begin to determine pathways forward to address the housing crisis, it is imperative that we innovate from Yupik technology and design. We would invite and strongly encourage investment funds to partner with designing homes relevant for our environment and way of life.