

**Testimony of Gaetano Brancaleone III , Principal, Hogarth Kingeekuk Sr.
Memorial School,
Bering Strait School District
Before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on: “Overcrowded Housing and the
Impacts on American Indian and Alaska Natives.”
August 25, 2018**

Good morning Senator Murkowski. Whanga aatqa Qawaagpaq (Gaetano Brancaleone III) and I am the Principal of Hogarth Kingeekuk Sr. Memorial School, within the Bering Strait School District in Western Alaska. It is my fifth year working as an administrator, and my eighth year serving the community of Savoonga as an educator. I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you today about Overcrowded Housing and the impacts that it has on our students in the Bering Strait School District.

Overcrowded housing has a direct impact on the education of our students. It can deprive them of basic needs such as sleep, and can lead to concerns with sanitation, health, and basic quality of life. In our schools, that impact is reflected in low attendance rates, exhausted and sleeping students in class, emotional distress, and frequent illness/health related absences. In speaking with these students and families, conversations about large numbers of people in one home, sleeping in shifts, the difficulty of sleeping when it is your shift because it is someone else’s “turn” to be awake, sleeping in corners, sleeping on the bare floor, or sleeping on a pile of clothes are not uncommon. When students and families have to navigate the hardships of overcrowded housing on a daily basis, their ability to succeed at school is greatly hindered.

Housing is one of the fundamental needs of every family, and the lack of that housing is disproportionately felt in Native communities in bush Alaska. In these rural locations, the cost of materials and the scarcity of trained tradesmen serve as obstacles to building safe, quality, and affordable housing. I urge the committee to continue supporting any funding streams that sustain the building of new homes or the repair and weatherization of existing structures. I would also ask the committee to develop or promote programs that support the training and certification of local tradesmen. Building this capacity locally could greatly reduce the costs of constructing adequate housing in rural locations, and have a direct and lasting impact on the quality of life for rural populations.

I want to thank the committee for taking the issue of overcrowded housing concerns seriously and for coming out to Sivungaq to hear the needs of the people. I hope that your visit is an informative one that leads to action. Your actions on these matters, or lack there of, have the potential to change lives forever. I trust you will not take that responsibility lightly. Igamsiqayugviikamsi.