

AFN report details Native problems throughout state

A report detailing the overall status of Alaska Natives issued by the Alaska Federation of Natives shows a fundamental failure of state and federal policies in rural Alaska.

It shows that despite improvements in health, educational opportunity, standard of living and access to government services, an increasing number of Alaska Natives face grave risks and declining opportunities.

"The AFN Report on the Status of Alaska Natives: A Call for Action" was produced by AFN with assistance from the Institute of Social and Economic Research.

"While many reports have been written to document various aspects of problems existing in rural Alaska, none have been able to give Native leaders and policymakers the perspective they need to understand how these problems are inter-related," said AFN President Janie Leask.

The analysis suggests that more often than not public policies and interventions intended to assist Native individuals, families and communities have created and perpetuated dependence, rather than self-sufficiency.

The report documents alarmingly high rates of health and social disorders and points to a 1988 statement by Dr. John Middaugh, the state epidemiologist, who characterized the present status of Alaska Natives as a "health crisis," and a "modern plague of our young."

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The report has been submitted to Native leaders throughout the state; Alaska's congressional delegation; Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs; and Gov. Steve Cowper.

According to Alan Parker, chief of staff for the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, the report will be the subject of hearings this spring in both Washington, D.C., and Alaska. The D.C. hearing has been set for March 10.

"Our challenge is to neither despair, nor believe we can muddle through these problems doing business as usual," Leask said, "the report is a call for action."