

# Shriver Reminded: Poverty at Nome

ARCTIC NATIVE BROTHERHOOD  
Box 333  
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Mr. Sargent Shriver  
Director,  
Office of Economic Opportunity  
Washington, D. C.

SUBJECT: Nome, Alaska

Dear Mr. Shriver:

I know you have had many complaints, but I wish to commend you on your public statement recently declaring Nome as "the worst slum area in America." You are very right in this statement.

In the past all other government men and politicians never came to see the real conditions of native housing and other living conditions. They usually came and were whisked away to a hotel. They make a talk at the Chamber of Commerce and then they leave.

Finally, after a hundred years, someone sees our true conditions. The radio people, the city fathers, and others are hollering about your statements. Some of these people live in Nome for years and do not know that these conditions exist less than a mile from them. They live in their own little world and try to run the local community. Many are here for only one or two years and then are gone again.

The Nome sewer system is set up so that it will never serve the majority of people who live in the Native sections. The city dump is located 300 yards from King Island Village (on outskirts of Nome) at the east end of the city. This dump is in use in winter for all waste and creates a terrible rat problem there. Since the villagers have no refrigerators food is stored in easy access to rats. Many of the villagers cannot afford the "honey-wagon" services and disposal of human waste outside the houses makes this condition even worse.

Almost all of the homes are one and two room frame shacks without insulation, any interior or exterior finishing, and single layer rough board floors. Usually four to twelve people live in each place. It is too bad that we were forced to move out of our sod houses because it was said that they are unsanitary. They were snug and warm. Now we must live in a cold frame house which cannot be heated. Two feet from the old oil-barrel stove, or something of that type, we can see our breath in the air. Many of the people cook on Coleman gasoline camp stoves. Most of them beach-comb in any kind of weather and in icy winds to get drift wood to burn for heat.

It seems that the only thing that was ever thought of about us was "welfare-ism". We are hoping that some kind of training program will be earmarked for Western Alaska. This place has mostly 80% unemployed or underemployed among the Native people.

We have sought many avenues for home loans for low income Natives. There are none, believe it or not. We are restricted from some grants such as E.D.A. for community halls because we live in a town over 2000 inhabitants - 2800 in fact. We have applied for a home improvement training course grant from O.E.O. We hope it will be approved. It will help some.

We know that government property which belongs to all the people of the United States must be kept in good repair. Here, where many construction materials do not weather the same as in the Lower 48, many times things like siding change or painting seems to be done when it is not really necessary. It looks like someone sends an order to 'paint every so many years, or change parts of houses every so often.' All that money spent and materials used is needed badly to improve Native housing. Icy cold floors, wind blowing through the houses, and places to put our waste materials would be much better for everyone than putting automatic unnecessary maintenance into BIA or other governmental housing. Maybe BIA and others don't realize this. We are certainly not against attractive and good sound housing for all who come up here to help us. Taking care of governmental housing improves our communities too. It seems though, that millions go into housing for the BIA employees in Alaska, but not a penny for the housing for the ones they are here to serve.

Thank you for coming to Nome, and for all your efforts and interest on behalf of the Natives of Alaska.

Sincerely,  
/s/ Jerome Trigg, Sr.  
President  
Arctic Native Brotherhood