



PHOTO BY BILL HESS

Georgianna Lincoln of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, testifies at a recent Bureau of Indian Affairs hearing while few people sit in the audience. Lincoln and others protested the hearing's location and lack of notice.

# BIA hearings bring protest, little comment

By LINDA LORD-JENKINS

*Tundra Times Staff*

Only six people testified last week at a hearing in Anchorage to take public comment on planned closing of 37 Bureau of Indian Affairs Day Schools.

Those who did testify criticized the short amount of time that the hearings were publicized, the location of the hearings — far away from any of the village schools which are marked for closure — and the plan to close the schools entirely.

A representative from the village of Tetlin in the Interior presented a petition containing 72 signatures in opposition to transferring the Tetlin day school to state control.

Some 37 students attend that school and parents want them to remain in the BIA facility.

The hearings were held in the federal court house in Anchorage but their location was the subject of sharp criticism from representatives from the Association of Village Council Presidents area and the Tanana Chiefs Conference.

But both Carl Jack, repre-  
(Continued on Page Twenty-Eight)



# Schools may not be improved for fall opening

(Continued from Page One)

sending AVCP and Georgiana Lincoln from TCC criticized the BIA for holding the hearings after the BIA had announced that the schools should be closed.

They also said that the hearings should be held in the villages which house the schools to be closed.

Jack, representing AVCP president Martin Vick, and a former AVCP president himself, told hearing officer Bill Brady that he shouldn't be surprised if no one attended the hearings for several reasons.

"Bear in mind that it appears to everyone that the decision has already been made. No one needs to waste time at a hearing which can do no good," said Jack.

"Also remember that the decision you are making most directly affects people in isolated villages. You are conducting this hearing in Anchorage."

But, despite the lack of attendance, Jack warned Brady and the BIA not to conclude that the people don't care about their villages.

"The people in those villages would never give up the right to decide one of the most important decisions in the lives of their children, and perhaps in their village . . . You know that people fought long and hard for the rule requiring vil-

lage concurrence before a school is closed.

"The message that you should take back to the other officials at BIA is that there should be no transfer of school unless the affected village agrees.

"If the bureau decides to take another course, it will be telling people in the villages that their decisions about their children and about their villages do not count in the eyes of the bureau," said Jack.

He told Brady that AVCP will take any means necessary to insure the BIA schools are not transferred without consent.

Lincoln criticized the BIA for not adequately giving notice of the hearings to the people in the villages and she told Brady that they should take the hearings to the villages affected to get the right comments.

Lincoln also reminded him that the BIA had late last year promised that no schools would be closed without consulting with the villages and receiving their consent.

Their consent was not obtained in many cases, said Lincoln.

Some 22 of the day schools slated to be transferred to state control are in the AVCP area. Five are in the TCC

region.

As of Monday, 14 BIA villages had signed the papers requesting the state take control of their schools. Those villages were Alakanuk, Gambell, Golovin, Good News Bay, Klukwan, Kwlethluk, Kawigillingok, Mekaryuk, Napaeak, Napaskeak, Nightmute, Oscarville, Quinhagak, and Scammon Bay. Stebbins reportedly also had voted to make the change but no confirmation could be obtained.

Three of those villages, Golovin, Klukwan, and Mekaryuk had not been slated to be turned over to the state this year because of costs.

Under the current two-option plan presented to Gov. Jay Hammond by BIA undersecretary in charge of Indian Affairs Ken Smith, the state can accept control of 16 day schools this year and the remainder next year or accept all 37 this year and accept about \$5 million from the federal government to help pay the cost of upgrading the schools.

Hammond recently sent Smith a letter stating that neither alternative was acceptable and telling Smith that he would seek help from the Congressional delegation.

One member of that delegation, U.S. Sen. Frank Murkowski, however, is less than sympathetic and he said in

an interview last week that there is little he can do other than to try to get both sides to work out their differences.

When asked of the BIA regulation requiring that the villages consent to the transfer, Murkowski said there was little to be done on that front.

"The BIA has taken the position that as long as the state can provide the education . . . they have asked the state to accept the responsibility for American Native education.

"It's a policy decision of the Department of Interior and the Department of Education and that's where its at," said Murkowski.

Carol Berger, who represented Hammond at the Anchorage hearing, said after the hearing that there is no way that even 16 day schools can be brought up to minimum fire and safety codes by the time school opens this fall.

And that leaves open the question of whether the schools will be able to open.

Berger said that the state still hasn't received final word on which schools will be transferred and until it does, can't start the work necessary to begin improving the schools.

Berger said that once the state receives notice of

which schools will be transferred, it will be necessary to have a person inspect each school to list the various code violations and ways to improve the schools to meet fire or safety codes.

The improvements will be presented to the public facilities section of the Department of Transportation for estimate on repair costs then the repairs probably will be let out to bid.

All this will take until probably the beginning of the school year, said Berger who added that if the schools can't be improved by the beginning of the school year, it may be the state fire marshall who determines if individual schools will open this fall.

She said estimates on the cost of improvements will be hard to come by because often, two or three solutions might be used to repair one problem.

For example, inadequate fire protection might be rectified by installing overhead sprinklers in each classroom or by installing half-inch sheet rock in the walls and building another door for fire evacuation.

Each school also will have to be inspected for sanitary waste disposal, said Berger.