

Counciller Tapped for Native Language Preservation Group

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Between her role as language manager at the Alutiiq Museum and as assistant professor of Alutiiq language and culture at Kodiak College, April Laktonen Counciller is very busy. Now she can add another title to her list as a newly appointed member of the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council. It was created by Governor Sean Parnell, who appointed five language professionals from around the state. Counciller said the group will serve in an advisory capacity for the governor and state government on the status of various Native languages

-- (Language Council 1 :25 “And maybe providing some recommendations but currently there’s no funding associated with the council so it’s not like additional grants are going to become immediately available as a result of the council. Or that there will be any major you know projects as a result of the council now. I think the main goal is just to provide additional information just to start the creation of some official policies at the state level.”)

Counciller said before her selection for the council, announcements were made across the state seeking native language speakers who would be willing to submit their names for consideration on the council. She said at first she was reluctant to submit herself.

-- (Language Council 2 :28 “But one of my colleagues, Walkie Charles, who was also chosen for the council, he called me and said you absolutely need to put your name in for this and he really would not take no for an answer and I kept trying to put him off but he really encouraged me to put my name in for consideration and that’s kind of how it all started to come together. So I did put my name in and they interviewed me and asked me some questions about the things that I’ve done in the community and why I think the council is important and why I’d want to be involved.”)

She said she didn’t hear anything for a long time but last week received a call offering her one of five spots on the council. The initial meeting of the council will be held in December in Anchorage, though Counciller said most of the meetings beyond that will most likely be teleconferenced. The first meeting will be an opportunity for members to suggest goals and ideas for the group and brainstorm potential policies that help native languages, something Counciller said she has thought a lot about.

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Council 3 :33 “One of the most important things we can do, and that doesn’t really require a lot of funding, is smooth out the avenues of communication between the various regions. Our state is a huge state and there are so many native languages and there are really good things happening around the state that we can share with each other to help improve the success rate for saving our native languages, so that’s one of the things I’d like to do, perhaps maybe even having a future conference but in the meantime having something where that information is being shared more readily between the different regions. ”)

Other policies Counciller hopes to work toward are providing stable funding sources. She said often times grants are only available to communities once, despite the success of a particular project. She hopes the state can take a more active role in advocating for federal funding for language programs. In general she said she’s honored to have the opportunity to serve on this council and be a part of statewide solutions to language learning.

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