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## **Alaska Natives Support Chemical Management Reform for Health of Their Communities and the Arctic**

*Group seeks environmental justice for the Indigenous Peoples of Alaska*

(Washington, D.C.) Today, the Senate Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics and Environmental Health will examine public exposures to toxic chemicals. Alaska Native leaders call on Congress to include circumpolar atmospheric pollution in their hearing.

**“Indigenous Arctic communities are suffering the most from chemicals emitted in the lower 48 states,”** said Vi Waghiyi, St. Lawrence Island Yupik and ACAT Environmental Health & Justice Program Director. **“Because many industrial and commercial chemicals are long lasting and persistent in the atmosphere, they drift North on wind and water currents from where they are applied in Southern latitudes, they are in our traditional foods and affecting our health and the health of our children. We are calling on Congress and the Obama Administration to affect policy to regulate chemicals to end the “contamination without consent” on our people from distant sources.”**

The Yupik people of St. Lawrence Island, and rural communities across the state of Alaska, are concerned about health problems that are associated with persistent organic pollutants present in their air, water, and food. This past fall a delegation of local leaders and elders from the island communities of Savoonga and Gambell traveled over 3,000 miles to Washington D.C. to raise awareness of the dire health effects in their communities.

**“While we are not physically near the action in Washington D.C., Congress has a responsibility to address the needs of tribal governments throughout the United States, especially remote Alaska,”** said Jane Kava, Mayor and St. Lawrence Island Community Health Researcher from Savoonga, Alaska.

St. Lawrence Island residents have experienced alarming rates of disease including cancers, diabetes, reproductive health problems, thyroid disease, nervous and immune system disorders, and learning disabilities. A community based participatory research study funded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences has demonstrated that the people of St. Lawrence Island have elevated PCBs in their blood, six to nine times the US average. These toxins are particularly prevalent among those who have used the Northeast Cape area for traditional hunting, fishing, and food gathering.

*ACAT is a non-profit statewide organization established in 1997 that empowers individuals and tribes throughout Alaska who are seeking assistance with toxic*

*contamination issues that affect the health of people and the environment. Half of its constituents are the indigenous people of the state that are from rural communities that continue their traditional subsistence lifestyle and culture.*

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