

## Testimony of Pamela Dalton Stearns

### Supporting Alaska Native Amendment to Violence Against Women Act

April 22, 2012, Juneau, AK

My name is Pamela Dalton Stearns. My Tlingit name is "Tling sei" I am Woosh Kee Taan (Eagle/Shark). I am a newly elected Seattle Delegate, born and raised in Juneau, AK. I am honored to serve as a newest member of the CCHITA's Judiciary Committee.

I am shocked and outraged that a bill intended to protect Native American Women does not protect Alaska Native women.

I had to flee Alaska and I know many other women who did the same. I met my first husband when I was 14 at a teenage club in Juneau. I fell in love with him, married him, and we had a son. The abuse started right away though. There was alcohol, lot's of it. There was hitting, punching, dragging, and screaming. I would be left to lie in blood, and wondering if I would live to the next day. One day, the end came. I was on my knees and he had a gun pressed to my head. He said he would kill me. I was tired of living that kind of life and told him to go ahead and shoot me. At the last second, he pulled the gun away and fired into the ceiling.

It was because of domestic violence, that I fled Alaska in the middle of the night, scared for my life. I had to leave Juneau because there were no laws in place that could protect me. But when I left, I didn't just leave my family behind, I left my culture behind.

When I moved to Seattle as a teenager, I ran away from my traditions, from my songs, my dances, and my heritage. I just wanted to be safe and leave that life behind. I tried to stop being Tlingit.

It wasn't until later in life, and with the power of prayer and recovery that I began my journey home. Today, I am not only a survivor of domestic violence, I am a warrior who is fighting to change the laws and the institutions that hurt our women and destroy our families. I have once again found my voice. And today, I am a proud parent of my son and two beautiful Tlingit teenage girls and I am passing on the traditions of our people to them.

The message I have for Alaska and for Congress is that we cannot let domestic violence take away our culture. We need our traditions and the wisdom of our ancestors to survive. And to do that, the Violence Against Women Act must be reauthorized and it must protect Alaska Native women.

