

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senator Click Bishop

Sponsor Statement

Senate Bill 78 – Katie John Day

Athabascan elder Katie John was well known for her determination and persistence in defense of Alaska Native customary and traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering rights. She was a mentor to many Alaskans through her teachings, humor, gentle spirit and loving ways. Katie John is an Alaska icon who devoted her life to protect the traditions of her ancestral homeland. Katie John died May 31, 2013. She was 97 years old.

Katie John lived in Mentasta Lake and was raised to live off the land under the tutelage of her mother, grandmother and other elders of her community. She was a consummate teacher and was always willing to share her ancestral traditions, culture and history. She was well known and respected throughout Alaska and around the world for her advocacy of Native rights.

Katie John was a member of the Ahtna Regional Native Corporation. According to Ahtna President Michelle Anderson, "Every great culture in the world is known by their traditional foods and the survival of a culture depends on the people's ability to gather those foods. Katie fought for our right to access our traditional homelands because she knew that we need to be able to feed our families. It was a matter of cultural and human survival."

Always passionate about preserving the Athabascan culture and language, Katie John was involved in teaching her Native language since 1974 and helped create the alphabet for the Ahtna dialect. She received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 2011. Katie John and her husband, Chief Fred John, who died in 2000, raised 14 children and 6 foster children. She leaves behind approximately 250 grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.

Due to her impressive role in protecting ancestral traditions in Alaska, SB 78 will establish the date of May 31 as Katie John Day in honor of her memory. This bill is a simple yet fitting tribute to a powerful woman who cherished the Alaskan way of life.