



Our Culture Unites us; Our Land Sustains us; Our People are Prosperous

Talking Points for [Senate Bill 78](#)

A bill for an act establishing May 31 as Katie John Day:

Katie John Day is established on May 31 of each year to honor Ahtna Athabascan elder Katie John for her mentoring and advocacy in defense of Alaska Native customary and traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering rights. Katie John Day may be observed by suitable observances and exercises by civic groups and the public.

Background Information

Respected and cherished Ahtna elder, Katie John passed away on Friday, May 31, 2013 at the age of 97. Katie was the champion, leader, and lead plaintiff in a decade-long legal battle addressing Native subsistence fishing rights. She fought not only to keep her family's fish camp but to maintain her traditional way of life, passing the traditions and practices to her children, grandchildren, and anyone willing to learn. She was born and raised in Slana and Batzulnetuz, Alaska, to parents Chief Charley and Sarah Sanford. Katie married Chief Fred John Sr. of Mentasta and raised their family there. Katie John was the matriarch of Mentasta and her people. She grew up when there were very few non-natives in the area and her family was still nomadic moving with the seasons and animals. She learned how to traditionally preserve food and make clothes. Her family walked everywhere and used pack dogs to help haul their supplies. Later in life she shopped for food and clothes in stores and learned to drive a car. Although she adapted to the changes in her life, she lived a very traditional life and never lost her traditional values.

Help by Testifying

The hearing on SB 78 in the Senate State Affairs Committee will be open to public testimony. **The meeting is scheduled to start at 1:30 pm this Thursday, April 4th.** People who want to testify can either go into a local Legislation Information Office (LIO) or call the off-net number at (844) 586-9085.

Talking Points for Hearing

- **Impact on Subsistence Rights:** We must honor and never forget her impact and importance in forever shaping, guiding, and protecting traditional and cultural rights. She was a woman of conviction who never aspired to be a well-known figure but became a hero. In an effort to preserve her traditional way of life, Katie John spearheaded the most significant litigation over subsistence rights in Alaska history. Katie John's legacy was enshrined as the protector of the customary and traditional way of life for all Alaska Natives.
- **Cultural and Traditional Bearer:** Without her persistence and unwillingness to concede, Alaska Natives as a whole would not be able to practice and enjoy traditional lifestyles, passing the ways of Native people on to the next generations, and ensuring traditional culture and heritage way of life are never forgotten.
- **Courageous Spirit:** In recognition of her fighter spirit and courageous battle, the University of Alaska Fairbanks decreed her with an honorary doctorate law degree in 2011.
- **Uncompromising Values:** She was a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother who was loved by hundreds, respected by thousands and recognized throughout the world as a strong, traditional Athabascan woman who spoke the truth from her heart and lived what she believed.
- **Respect and Honor:** May 31 would forever mark a day to honor this woman who gave so much for all Alaska Native people and effectively changed how subsistence hunting and fishing is defined in Alaska today.