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February 28, 2025

University of Alaska Board of Regents  
[ua-bor@alaska.edu](mailto:ua-bor@alaska.edu).

Dear Regents:

For 58 years, the statewide Alaska Historical Society has worked to ensure that Alaska's history incorporates diverse perspectives and embraces an inclusive vision of whose stories matter and what stories get told. As a result, we are deeply troubled by the University of Alaska Board of Regents' hasty adoption of a motion on February 21, 2025. Passed on a 9-1 vote, it declares that the university shall "no longer refer to affirmative action," "DEI" nor use the words "diversity, equity, inclusion or other associated terms." This motion, vaguely worded and chilling in its implications on freedom of speech, strikes at the heart of the academic enterprise and calls into question how exactly one can teach an accurate interpretation of Alaska's history.

Of equal concern, the Alaska Historical Society believes the motion violates the Regents' own [Statement of Expectations](#), which calls for "dedication to the mission of the University of Alaska, the needs of its multiple and diverse public and private constituencies and the overall public good." The Board seems to have undermined the values and mission of the university and has hamstrung its educators from teaching and conducting valuable research on the history of our state and nation. That this motion was neither included on the posted agenda nor open to public comment calls into question the fidelity that Regents have to transparent processes essential to their duty of care and stewardship of the university in the public interest.

Moreover, the Board of Regents has failed to articulate the impetus behind this motion. It does not respond to any statutory or regulatory change at the federal or state level. There is no legal judgement or court order that has banned the use of specific words used in and by academic institutions or their employees. It seems this Board has instead responded to an equally nebulous executive order from President Trump (Executive Order 14151) that has now been blocked by a U.S. District judge on the basis of its highly dubious constitutional merit.

As historians, we are keenly aware of the sacrifices that generations of patriotic Americans made to establish, maintain and stabilize our representative form of government. We are shocked and disappointed that the caretakers of our state's public university system have willfully acquiesced to a president who has so brazenly operated in open defiance of

constitutional norms and historic precedents. These actions suggest the Board of Regents has become willfully complicit with an increasingly lawless administration that has acted with reckless disregard for the separation of powers.

History professor Timothy Snyder warned of such complicit cowardice with his notion of “anticipatory obedience.” Snyder has convincingly demonstrated that “most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. In times like these, individuals think ahead about what a more repressive government will want, and then offer themselves without being asked. Citizens who adapt in this way teach power what it can do.” Such behavior was evident in the rise of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union roughly a century ago and is a hallmark of contemporary autocratic regimes in Russia and China.

The Alaska Historical Society believes our nation’s history is exceptional in our deeply held commitment to building a diverse, inclusive, multiracial democracy, even as we have not always lived up to our highest aspirations. We furthermore believe that Alaska is defined by its cultural, linguistic, demographic, ecological and geographic diversity. The Alaska Historical Society is dedicated to grappling meaningfully with the complexity of our state and the struggle for inclusion that many Alaskans have championed. From Alaska Natives to women to immigrants, Alaska’s history is a capacious mosaic that simply cannot be understood without deep, meaningful and reflective discussion of our diversity and the attendant struggles and claims for inclusion and equity and especially including those who have not always been invited to the table or invited to share their story.

This Board Regents’ motion undermines how we teach, research and even think about Alaska’s history, and the history of the nation more generally. Diversity, equity and inclusion are fundamental to historical interpretation and education. The Alaska Historical Society calls on the University of Alaska Board of Regents to rescind its poorly crafted and hastily adopted policy. It further calls on the Regents to fully engage the university community and Alaskans in recognizing the enormous value of diversity, equity and inclusion in the university’s mission and Alaska’s history.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors, Alaska Historical Society

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