

# First Alaskans Institute



## News Release

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## ALASKA NATIVE POLICY CENTER POLICY DIRECTOR ANNOUNCED

Anchorage, Alaska – First Alaskans Institute (FAI), a statewide Alaska Native nonprofit focused on advancing Alaska Natives for the *next* 10,000 years, is excited to share that **Barbara 'Wáahlaal Gíídaak Blake** (Haida/Tlingit/Ahtna Athabascan) has recently been hired as our Alaska Native Policy Center Director. She will lead the development and operation of the Alaska Native Policy Center, which works to achieve our strategic priorities of *Advancing Self-Determination, Advancing Our Ways of Life, Being Good Relatives, Shaping the Knowledge that Informs Alaskans and Knowing, Living, and Loving Who We Are*. 'Wáahlaal Gíídaak will promote the self-determination of Alaska Native peoples through strengthening opportunities for indigenous voices to be at the forefront of leading, solving, confronting, and advocating for our communities.

'Wáahlaal Gíídaak is from Prince of Wales Island and lives in Juneau where she will be based out of for this position. She belongs to the Káat nay-st/Yahkw Jáanaas (Shark House/Middle Town People) Clan. She is the daughter of Sandra Demmert (Yahkw Jáanaas) and Kenneth Johnson (Naltsiine) who is Ahtna Athabascan, and the granddaughter of Frances Demmert Peele (Yahkw Jáanaas), Franklin Demmert, Sr. (Teeyeeneidi), Irene Johnson (Naltsiine) and Walter Johnson (Norwegian). 'Wáahlaal Gíídaak is a founding member of the Xaadaas Dagwii, a Haida dance group in Juneau, and is a lifelong member of the Heinyaa Kwaan dance group based in Klawock. She is also part of the Polynesian Voyaging Society where she crewed on a leg of Mālama Honua, a worldwide voyage completed in 2017.



Photo by Berett Alexa Wilber

She earned her master's degree from University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) in Rural Development, focused on Fisheries Development in Rural Alaska. She also has a bachelor's degree in Rural Economic Development, as well as an associate's degree in Tribal Management from UAF. She also has a certificate in Tribal Governmental Business Law from Seattle University.

'Wáahlaal Gíídaak most recently served as director of Native and Rural Affairs for the Governor and Lt. Governor of the State of Alaska. Prior to that, she served as Government Affairs Liaison for Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska and Assistant Professor for UAF Department of Alaska Native Studies and Rural Development. In addition, 'Wáahlaal Gíídaak has worked as the Technical Assistant Specialist for Intertribal Agriculture Council and Program Assistant in the Office of the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Office of Tribal Relations. She participated in our 2017 First Nations' Futures Program Fellowship and received the First Alaskans Institute Young Native Leader award at our 2018 Howard Rock & Ted Stevens Smokehouse Gala. She is also an alum of our Public Policy Fellowship program where she served in the office of Senator Kookesh. She currently serves on the Board of Directors for Sealaska Corporation, the first descendant shareholder to hold such a position.

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**About First Alaskans Institute (FAI):** *At FAI we know we are responsible for carrying more than 10,000 years of ancestral knowledge into the future with rigor, humor, resilience, vigilance, and love. To learn more visit our website at [www.firstalaskans.org](http://www.firstalaskans.org), contact us at 907-677-1700 or email [info@firstalaskans.org](mailto:info@firstalaskans.org).*