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Murkowski Introduces Legislation to Help Alaska's Public School Staffing Shortage

Washington, DC—Today, U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) introduced legislation to help ensure Alaska's students continue to have access to qualified teachers. Senator Murkowski's bill would exempt public schools from the new \$100,000 fee for each H-1B visa imposed last year by President Trump. Many of Alaska's school districts have relied on this program to help address persistent teacher shortages across the state.

"As soon as this proclamation was released last year, I sounded the alarm with the administration about the importance of the H-1B visa program to Alaska's school districts," **said Senator Murkowski**. "Our public school classrooms have been facing a staffing crisis for years, but teachers in Alaska on H-B visas have been instrumental in bridging that shortage and serving our students with talent and care. This legislation offers a commonsense exemption that will ensure Alaska's schoolchildren have access to more high-quality educators while keeping class sizes reasonable."

"International teachers are essential to keeping classrooms open across Alaska. Today, 573 educators, about 8.5% of the state's teaching workforce, are serving on visas, and more than half of Alaska's school districts rely on

these teachers to staff their schools,” **said Dr. Lisa Parady, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators.** “In some rural districts, visa teachers make up 50% to nearly 80% of the teaching staff. School districts already invest \$6,000 to \$12,000 per teacher to recruit and sponsor educators through the H-1B visa process. Adding a \$100,000 federal visa fee has made it financially impossible for many districts to continue hiring the teachers their students depend on. Without an exemption for K-12 public education, rural schools across Alaska would face severe staffing shortages and significant disruptions to student learning.”

“The recent \$100,000 H-1B visa fee has made it impossible for districts like ours to continue recruiting the educators we need,” **said Dr. Cyndy Mika, Superintendent of the Kodiak Island Borough School District.** “Nearly 20% of our teachers are on visas, and almost 75% of our village teachers are international hires. These educators are not replacing American teachers—we simply do not have applicants for these positions. Without access to international educators, districts like Kodiak will struggle to fill classrooms and provide consistent learning environments for students. Senator Murkowski’s effort to exempt public school teachers from this fee recognizes the reality facing rural districts and helps ensure that our students continue to have qualified teachers in their classrooms. In Kodiak, international teachers are the difference between a classroom having a teacher or not.”

“As many districts across the state of Alaska have experienced budget deficits, having to pay a \$100,000 H-1B visa fee for each incoming international teacher is unrealistic,” **said Tammy Dodd, Superintendent of the Bering Strait School District.** “This puts rural Alaskan districts at a unique disadvantage as we are unable to hire J-1 teachers due to the restrictions of their visas, so the H-1B visa is the only choice. The Bering

Strait School District employs 86 international teachers, which is roughly 40% of certified staffing. With the new fee in place, the district would be unable to replace those positions with international hires.”

“In the Kuspuk School District, international teachers are not a supplement to our workforce. They are essential to keeping schools open,” **said Madeline Aguiard, Superintendent of the Kuspuk School District.**

“Senator Murkowski’s legislation recognizes a simple truth: rural students deserve access to qualified teachers just as much as any student in America, and removing this barrier helps ensure schools in the most remote communities can continue to provide stable, high-quality instruction for the children and families we serve.”

“Throughout the country, and to an extreme degree in Alaska, rural students face substantial barriers to accessing equitable opportunities for academic learning and healthy personal development,” **said Andrew Anderson, Superintendent of the Lower Kuskokwim School District.** “The \$100,000 H-1B visa fee is an additional and insurmountable barrier to Alaska's critical need for qualified teachers who are essential to students' healthy growth and learning.”

Background:

On September 19, 2025, President Trump issued a proclamation requiring all H-1B visa applicants to accompany their petitions with a payment of \$100,000 to be considered for entry into the U.S., in addition to existing fees and costs. School districts across Alaska have faced persistent teaching shortages while struggling

to hire domestically. Alaska has made significant progress in addressing the issue by recruiting internationally and using the H-1B visa program to help ensure classrooms remain staffed.

On October 8, 2025, Senator Murkowski wrote a letter to then-Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem urging her to use her discretionary waiver authority to exempt teachers from the increased fee.

Senator Murkowski highlighted in the letter to the Department that “Alaska’s most rural school districts have small budgets—particularly in light of the high costs to provide services in rural Alaska—due to small student populations. A requirement to pay \$100,000 per H-1B teacher would be impossible to meet—both for the districts and the individual teachers.”

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