

February 2, 2014

Senators Pete Kelly and Kevin Meyer, Co-Chairs
Senate Finance Committee, Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Kelly and Senator Meyer:

I am writing to express opposition to Senate Joint Resolution 9 under consideration by the Senate Finance Committee. SJR 9 seeks to change the constitution to allow public funds be used for private, for-profit religious and secular schools. I think that the most important responsibility of the members of the Alaska State Legislature is to accept responsibility for providing for an educated and strong Alaskan community, and provide adequate funding to support that ideal by sufficiently managing our plentiful resources. The voucher legislation is in direct conflict with that goal. It will deplete limited resources and provide more resources to students whose families have demonstrated that they are able to afford the religious alternatives in which they have enrolled their children.

Providing an adequate education within the public education system for children of our Great State is of utmost importance. When you travel throughout the regions of our state, you will find schools that have failed to provide an adequate, minimal level of education for a lot of complicated reasons. As policy makers, there needs to be great attention to what must be done to support those schools in crisis and help their students make adequate academic growth. Instead of providing more resources to the families that have demonstrated they can afford options, we need to find ways of better supporting those school districts with the lowest student achievement performance. The effect of SJR 9 is to divert potentially over \$100 million for a purpose that does not benefit the ideal goal of government providing basic needs.

Another important point is that when families want to exercise their right to choose, they have many choices. Families can choose to have options within our public education system or they can choose private education. Private education is often subsidized by the primarily religious organizations which provide the private education system. Private education, more often than not, experiences low taxes as non-profit organizations or are tax-free. Private education choices can be provided at a low cost to the consumers. When I was growing up, my parents enrolled my two sisters and me in a religious school in Anchorage. There was only one wage earner in the family. There was a lot of financial support opportunities for those who wanted the assistance.

The fact of the matter is that within public education, there are choices. It is not a one size fits all type of education program. School districts have encouraged options within public education by providing choices, outside of the typical charter school model.

I've worked as a professional educator for over 20 years in three school districts, which include the Juneau School District, the Anchorage School District, and the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District. I own property in each of those school district boundaries and have connections to those communities. During my years of public service, I've witnessed a number of education options become more available to parents. Parents have wanted options and districts have provided many options, as long as they could be options provided to the good of the whole, instead of a religious few. Please find the enclosure an overview of options available within two of the largest five school districts in the state. The information is available on the Juneau and Anchorage School Districts' webpages.

Best wishes,

Kimberly Homme

Attachment: Alternative Programs within the ASD & JSD