

Here's what I wanted to say and I would really appreciate it getting consideration. I was also told I would be able to submit written testimony this evening but apparently that is not the case as the bill has already moved out of committee. But I must say it anyway. While I agree with many of the things I have heard in opposition to this bill I have not heard anyone, really, speak about the impact on small remote communities, their public schools, and the children in them. I know these children and families and I must speak up.

I have been hearing that the State is saying that this bill would have no financial impact. I couldn't disagree more. Two examples of not only fiscal harm but probably real educational harm are easily identifiable. The Copper River School District has had three of seven schools close in the last few years. The State built a brand new elementary and Jr/Sr High School in Glennallen in the past few years. This is a very religious community. Should students be drawn out of the school by a new religious school option in Glennallen the per student cost of education in Glennallen would invariably go up. You still need teachers, heat, maintenance and everything that goes with a school whether you have 200 students or 100 but the cost per student is quite different and the quality of education offered decreases with decreasing resources. The second example I think is even more potent, probable, and harmful. In Port Alsworth 52 of the 54 students in the school attend the Non-denominational Christian Church supported by Franklin Graham and Samaritan's Purse. The State is building a brand new school in Port Alsworth in the summer of 2014 (breaking ground in just a few months). This community would have no problem organizing and adding religious money to the state vouchers brought in by those 52 students. They even have a large building in town that could strategically house a school for long enough for the public school population to drop to two, the district to close the school, and for the new school to negotiate a lease or purchase of the brand new but now closed school. Where would those last two students go? Their school would be gone. Their ability to engage in the community would be gone. This truly would be the State of Alaska building a religious school a building, funding the school, and eliminating a school option for the non-church members. This may sound far fetched to someone from outside but it really isn't. I've lived in this community for years, sent my kids to the school and have fully engaged with my neighbors. These are nice people but this is the reality of small community. There simply isn't enough for "choice." There's only enough for ONE when the numbers are low. We need to all stay in it together and make it the absolute best we can.

To say that studies that have looked at public money funding private schools in the lower-48 don't cause harm: 1 I don't think that's true. I think it has caused harm. But 2. more importantly Alaska ISN'T the lower-48. There are some real and significant differences. One of them is tiny fly in only communities with low populations, differential financial ability, and a dicotomy of beliefs. There isn't room for choice in these situations. Only one school is going to survive. Public schools can provide great educations to *all* leaving parents in charge of religion. Religious schools do not provide for all. So in these situations 1. students will be left w/o any option. and 2. public schools will be left w/o sufficient funds (or will COST THE STATE MORE). So don't pretend there's no impact. We know better than that.

I spent 8 years living in Gakona on the Copper River, the past four years in Port Alsworth and now split my time between the Turnagain neighborhood in Anchorage (School Year) and Port Alsworth (Summer). We moved for the great public schools in Anchorage because we felt that

the school in Port Alsworth was not going to be able to educate our kids in the way they (and we) needed. I now have one child in the Highly Gifted Program at Roger's Park Elementary and one in preschool.

Thanks,
Megan Richotte
Parent