

TESTIMONY re. HB 278

BY PATRICIA YOUNG

2/10/14

Madame Chair, my name is Patricia Young, I am a life-long Alaskan and member of the Tetlin tribe.

I am speaking to you today, as the chairperson of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, Education Council.

While HB 278 appears to offer a little something for everyone, it falls far short of being a vehicle for systemic improvement or meaningful educational reform. Unfortunately, most of the provisions of the bill appear to consist as extraneous ideas that have been kicked around for the past 10 to 15 years, and not part of an integrated, well thought-out plan, based upon study and review, and supported by objective research.

As such, we believe that the passage of HB 278 would, at best, result in a costly experiment without regard for the potential negative impact that it might have for Alaska's students in general, and specifically for rural communities and their families.

- Without convincing research that demonstrates the effectiveness of boarding schools in regards to student achievement,

- and despite the deleterious social impact that such schools have had for many families and communities in the past,
- and despite the negative economic impact that could result from the potential closure of schools in small communities as a result of the establishment of more residential schools,

HB 278 focuses much of its attention on promoting a return to boarding schools as the preferred model for Alaska's public education system for its rural communities.

We fail to see the logic or supporting research behind the state's promotion of this approach and have seen no evidence of a consensus among rural communities regarding the establishment of a boarding school education system.

The bill does include several provisions that, in and of themselves, deserve serious consideration and support, such as

- the reauthorization of the Alaska technical and vocational education program;
- an increase in the Base Student Allocation; and
- repeal of the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam.

Timely and appropriate action on these education-related issues should move forward and not be held hostage in an effort to advance the other provisions of HB 278 which are not supported by clearly defined logic, objective review, or research.

The TCC Education Council views this bill as being deeply flawed and strongly opposes its passage for the reasons just stated.

As always, we will continue to work with the governor, the legislature and Tribal leadership in the Interior to continue open and inclusive dialogue, support efforts to explore evidence-informed education models with quantifiable outcome measures and proven results and do whatever we can to help to make Alaska's public education system more equitable and effective in fulfilling its important mission for all of Alaska's students.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to address this important issue.

****Highlighted sections = shorter presentation
(approx. 1 minute when read at steady speed)**