

Testimony for HJR 1

From LaDawn Druce -Sterling

To Representative Wes Keller – Chair

Representatives Foster, LeDoux, Lynn, Gruenberg, Millett, Pruitt

Good Morning Representative Keller and members of the committee. My name is LaDawn Druce and I am writing this testimony as an individual.

It is my understanding the committee is taking testimony today on HJR 1. Given the fact that Representative Keller is the prime sponsor of this legislation, I would like to refer to some comments from his Sponsor Statement released on March 1, 2013.

The first paragraph of the statement suggests that, “Recent reports show Alaska’s students failing to graduate from secondary schools at an alarming rate.” This statement brings a few questions to mind. Is the graduation rate lower than it has been in past years? Do the lower graduation rates come primarily from rural Alaska, our larger districts, areas with higher poverty, areas with a more transient population, etc. Is the committee aware of the formula for determining “graduation rates?”

The second paragraph states the language of our current constitution “hampers a quality education for our students by preventing them to excel at a school that meets their needs.” The assumption seems to be a lack of quality in our public schools. With the exceptional variety of opportunities available to our students in our public schools it would seem virtually impossible for there not to be “a good fit” for the vast majority of our students. My question to the committee would be is the committee aware of the numerous opportunities our students in public school are afforded? Granted some parents may feel a private school; their curriculum, their particular value systems, and their educational philosophy might be the best choice for their child and that is fine, that is their choice and public tax monies should not support that decision.

Finally, I agree with Representative Keller that as, “Alaskan’s we are truly concerned that our children receive the best education opportunity available and we are willing to move forward in a positive educational decision process.” However, my question is who decided that changing our state constitution and allowing the public to vote would be the best mechanism for moving forward? In school districts and states that have instituted this type of system it has not been proven to be of educational value for their students. Where was the public outcry demanding our legislators take up this type of unprecedented action?