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SPONSOR STATEMENT

SENATE BILL 57

"An Act relating to parental involvement in education; adjusting pupil transportation funding; amending the time required for employers to give tenured teachers notification of their nonretention; and providing for an effective date."

Senate Bill 57 has three components. Firstly, it seeks to improve our efforts at the state and district level of encouraging increased parental involvement in the development of every child's reading skills. Secondly, it automatically adjusts pupil transportation costs by the annual inflation rate of Anchorage. Thirdly, it shifts the March 16 annual notification deadline for non-retained, non-tenured school faculty to May 15.

Early Literacy

There is a growing trend among states recognizing the need for early identification, intervention, and retention strategies for young students struggling with reading proficiency by the third grade. In the context of college and career readiness, and the resources being used for remediation in reading, writing, and math, there is a body of evidence suggesting our systemic problem begins early in a child's educational career, even at pre-school. While this bill does not intend to interfere with local control in identification, intervention, and retention policies, the state can at least up its efforts to inform parents of the importance of their child reading proficiently by the third grade.

Pupil Transportation

It is costing more each year to transport our students safely to and from school. SB 57 recalibrates the funding for pupil transportation by annually adjusting it according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for Anchorage. This change allows the funding to match the amounts agreed to in their most recent contract negotiations, providing a more realistic figure for the actual cost of pupil transportation. Currently most districts have to subsidize their pupil transportation programs, which takes foundation formula dollars out of the classroom.

Notification of Layoff or Nonretention

The budget cycle of the Alaska Legislature does not come to completion until mid-April annually. On March 16, the Legislature is a long way from being done writing the state budget. Meanwhile school districts are forced to issue pink slip notifications to staff on or by March 16, even though their budget levels are not yet known. This must cause anxiety on many levels, including the classroom. However, by the end of April all funding levels are known and school districts can act accordingly, including a retraction of the layoff pink slips. With such an arbitrary deadline for school districts to notify their faculty of potential layoffs, it is both unfair and inefficient to continue going through this exercise. SB 57 proposes to move the notification deadline to May 15 to better accommodate state and local budget planning.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

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