**Testimony by Stan Lujan, Chairperson on the Board for the Southeast Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC-SEA)**

**To the Finance Committee**

**Request: to reinstate funding for the Best Beginning’s and Parents as Teachers Program**

**March 23, 2013 – 10am Legislative Chambers – State Capitol**

**If you cant’ read – Let’s build more Prisons –**

**And how Best Beginnings, who helps fund Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, and Parents as Teachers is a good investment on the ‘Best Beginnings’ for our Young Children in our Great state of Alaska?**

I have read in a number of articles that prisons are predicting inmate populations based on their state’s third grade reading proficiency.

Recent research released by [The Annie E. Casey Foundation](http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Education.aspx), found that students who don't read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma when compared to proficient readers. The number rises shockingly when those kids also come from poverty.

How does the topic of prisons, fit into the discussion of helping students to read at an early age?

The most recent National Adult Literacy Survey and information from the U.S Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Commerce, reported that the percentage of prisoners in U.S. jails who tested at the third grade reading proficiency as high as 70%.

The majority of those prisoners had trouble with basic word attack skills, concepts of print, a low vocabulary, and few books to read, before entering their first year of school.

This is true for many of our own children in Alaska, especially those in poverty and living in villages and small communities within our state.

To turn the tide on drop-out prevention, educators, politicians and researchers around the country have been looking for ways to prevent dropouts from leaving school and becoming successful readers by the third grade.

Continuing to fund Best Beginnings, is critical as part of the overall strategy when addressing our dropout rate and reading levels for our own children in Alaska.

Research has shown that intensive interventions in early reading skill and promoting healthy parenting skills, will remediate many reading deficiencies – thus, reducing our drop-out-rate and prison incarceration drastically.

Unfortunately, in many states, there are legislators who do not understand the importance of early childhood education and the struggles of beginning readers. In Alaska that is not the case. Your prior funding support for Best Beginnings is a testimony to that commitment.

In summary, Best Beginnings has already proven that early interventions for young children in Alaska continue to pay off.

The programs supported by Best Beginnings are simple, inexpensive, family-based, and they work.

So we all hope you find it in your heart to continue the full support of Best Beginnings and Parents as Teachers – an invaluable asset for our state and for our children.