



March 26, 2013

**AMERICAN CIVIL
LIBERTIES UNION OF
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The Honorable Lynn Gattis, Chair
The Honorable Lora Reinbold, Vice-Chair
House Education Committee
Alaska State House of Representatives
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

via email: Rep.Lynn.Gattis@akleg.gov
Rep.Lora.Reinbold@akleg.gov

**Re: HB 31: Constitutional Curriculum
ACLU Letter of Support**

Dear Chair Gattis and Vice-Chair Reinbold:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this Letter of Support for House Bill 31.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Alaska represents thousands of members and activists throughout Alaska who seek to preserve and expand the individual freedoms and civil liberties guaranteed by the United States and Alaska Constitutions.

Our Constitutional history is remarkable and unique. The United States Constitution has endured for more than 200 years, guiding the development of a single continuous republic from the 18th century into the 21st. Encouraging school children around the state to learn about their Constitutional heritage will help shepherd the nation and the state into its future.

The United States Constitution is, by far, the oldest national constitution in continuous use. Even in European countries that might trace their national origins thousands of years in the past, constitutions have come and gone. The

United States, however, has updated its constitution by amendment and reinterpretation in a trial-and-error process that has been, at many times, ugly and even bloody, but a process which has made us the nation we are today. We are stronger as a nation for that struggle.

Considering the relevance of such coursework to the present day, we would also invite the committee to consider adding to the bill the discussion of the Reconstruction Amendments, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. The upheaval of the Civil War was the greatest challenge to the American constitutional republic, and the Reconstruction Amendments were a vital part of reuniting and redefining the republic. While other amendments have equal force of law, later amendments did not fundamentally alter the nation's history or the balance of powers in the same way as the Reconstruction Amendments. Understanding the historical context of the adoption of those three amendments would serve Alaskan students well.

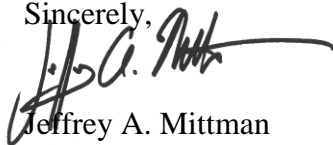
We would also suggest that the committee consider adding the Alaska Constitution to the list of topics to be discussed under HB 31. The Alaska Constitution was written by bright, idealistic men and women who could observe 48 other states' experiences in constitutional governance. The Alaska Constitution contains important lessons for students. Discussion of the Alaska Constitution will also, naturally, provide an opportunity to discuss Alaska history with students.

Conclusion

We hope that the Education Committee will take note of our support of HB 31 and our proposals for expanding its scope. HB 31 will encourage our students to understand their role as stewards of constitutional governance, the benefits that flow from the constitution, and the importance of defending our constitutionally-governed republic.

Thank you again for letting us share our thoughts. Please feel free to contact the undersigned should you have any questions or seek additional information.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Mittman
Executive Director
ACLU of Alaska

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