

HB 57
OPPERATING BUDGET
SUPPORTING
DOCUMENTS
March 4, 2017

#49

Deanne Cooper

Wrangell, AK

Issue: Alaska Marine Highway

March 4, 2017

To the members of the House Finance Committee,

The ferries are our highway, they are the way we travel between towns in Southeast AK. People up north might not understand this because most can drive from one place to another, but here in southeast Alaska we are on islands and there are no connecting roads, no bridges only water. The ferries are important for many who live here. When young adults want to go to college and need a car they take the ferry, not ship it by barge. Example: fall of 2015 my daughter and boyfriend attended UAA they had to take a truck to get around. If the truck did not go by ferry, it would have been very costly in money and time if we had to wait on the barge.

I have family that lives in other towns and when time permits I like to take the ferry to see them. Just a year ago I was having to escort my mom and family dog to Ketchikan every couple of months to see a vet. If we had to fly it would have never happened.

Just as up north relies on their roads to travel we rely on the ferries.

Thank you for listening.

Deanne Cooper

Wrangell, Alaska 99929

#50

Ann Turner Olson

Juneau, AK

Issue: OCS, Education

I appreciate the movement of resources into providing for more front line social workers to allow for smaller case loads and better attention to children in foster care.

- Please vote to add the additional funds for Office of Children's Services for increased caseworkers
- Please vote to fully support funding for K – 12 public education

I appreciate your work developing a sustainable and responsible fiscal plan for the coming years to provide adequate sources of revenue to support necessary and critical state services - funds for education and mental and reproductive health are critical to continue to support.

thank you,

respectfully submitted,

Ann Turner Olson, LCSW

Douglas, Ak 99824

#51

Chelsea Vukovich

Anchorage, AK

Issue: Education

Hello, My name is Chelsea Vukovich and I am a resident and registered voter in Anchorage. As you continue on the daunting task of setting a state budget I would like to ask that the legislature keep in mind the ramifications of budget cuts to education and implore you not to cut education spending.

The state operating budget has been cut by almost 30% over the past two years. Alaska is already in a recession, and our unemployment rate is now the highest in the nation. For the long-term health of our Alaskan economy, we cannot afford further budget cuts, which mean more jobs lost.

-School districts around the state have had to reduce teachers, staff and expenses for the past five years due to flat funding of K-12 public education, and it is hurting student learning and outcomes. We need to invest in our students, not cut more!

-Support full funding of the BSA (Base Student Allocation) at \$5930 provided by this bill (which, when rising health care and other costs are factored, still means cuts in what that money can provide).

-Oppose the amendment to this bill that reverses state reimbursement for bond debt already issued. Almost **\$58 million** that voters were told the state would repay will be shifted to school districts under this amendment! This places a huge financial burden on school districts and will likely lead to many teacher cuts.

-Support the \$6 million in school funding this bill has added back to reverse a Governor veto of school busing funds. That allows school districts to spend more on teachers.

Thank you for your time and I wish you luck,

Chelsea Vukovich

#52

Margarita J. Suafoa

Issue: Women's Shelters

As an avid supporter, proponent, and employee of Abused Women's Aid in Crisis (AWAIC), I would like to thank the committee for their continual support in protecting victims of domestic violence. Your ongoing funding allows AWAIC to strive to meet the needs for victims services and prevention work.

At AWAIC, we acknowledge and are grateful for the multitude of departments that provide support to meet the needs of those we serve, but recognize that the most significant support comes from the Council on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault (CDVSA).

As a recipient of funding from CDVSA, AWAIC has been able to shelter 436 women and 245 children. We have been able to provide legal advocacy to 308 individuals. Our outreach program has been able to reach 7,361 Anchorage community members through education, training, and prevention.

It is my hope that AWAIC can continue to rely on your ongoing financial support.

Sincerely,

Margarita J Suafoa

#53

Tiffany Jackson

AEBSD School District

Fully fund base student allocation

Dear House Finance Committee Members,

I'm writing to you as a local school board member regarding the House Operating Budget. Specifically, I'd like to address the education portion of the budget. I strongly urge you to fully fund the base student allocation at \$5930. School districts across the state are already in the process of creating their budgets, and issuing teacher contracts. My district is in the middle of the budgeting process as well. We've already issued teacher contracts, so making adjustments and cuts now would be difficult.

We're a small school district. From talking to some legislators, it appears there is a frame of thinking technology will enable districts to cut costs. In the future, perhaps this may be true, though I'd hate to think of a school system where we're asking students to stare extensively at a computer/television screen, with limited human interaction. I believe we'd lose out in student engagement. Right now however, we simply do not have the infrastructure to recognize any cost savings without substantially losing in student achievement.

In my district, our internet service is delivered via satellite. Not only is this expensive, but bandwidth is so slow, utilizing online tools to enrich the learning environment is difficult. When it comes to online testing, the first year the state utilized online assessment, we had to shut down all internet functionality so students could test one at a time. We work extremely hard to utilize video conferencing when possible to take advantage of cost savings. When I first joined the school board, we would meet in person 3 times per year. Now, we meet in person once a year, in tandem with professional development, and the rest of the time via video conference. However, this has not been easy. There has not been a single video conference board meeting where we haven't had connectivity issues, with one or more sites getting disconnected, or sound being garbled. Every time this happens, I think of us asking students to put up with connectivity issues while we work to meet their educational needs via technology. While I think it's possible, savings won't be recognized until the digital disparity issues we face around the state are addressed.

In addition to fully funding the base student allocation at \$5930, I ask you to please fully fund bond debt reimbursement and pupil transportation. We are all hurting from the financial difficulties facing the state of Alaska, municipalities included. By shifting the full burden of school construction bonds to municipalities, I'm concerned local contributions to school districts may go down, further impacting public education. When it comes to transportation, for many of districts in Alaska have little control over cutting or reducing transportation services. They are what they are.

Finally, I thank you for the hard work you're doing. This is not an easy time in Alaska's history to be part of the legislature. I know the decisions you're making are hard and the time required to do this work is considerable. I thank you for taking our children's future, which public education plays such a large part of, as a priority as our children are Alaska's future. Fully funding the base student allocation at \$5930, as well as bond debt reimbursement and pupil transportation, are an important part of taking care of Alaska's future as well.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Jackson

#54

Monique Musick
Ester, AK
Issues: UA, TVEP

Honorable Representatives,

Thank you for your service and for taking the time to review my testimony.

I graduated from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 2001 with a degree in journalism. I now work for the university's Statewide Public Affairs Office providing communications support for the president, Board of Regents, UA Scholars and many other aspects of the university system. As a result I am highly informed on the impact that budget reductions have had on the system and the urgent need to support the Regents funding request. I also understand the challenges the state is facing due to the severe loss of revenue. You have many difficult choices to make in prioritizing public spending.

State funding of the University has been cut by \$53 million (14%) over the last three years. While that may seem minimal percentage-wise, that is equal to nearly twice the University of Alaska Southeast's annual budget of \$27 million. The reality of these reductions are hitting the university hard. We have had to cut more than 900 positions and eliminate or suspend 50 academic programs.

I recognize that maintaining the current funding level of \$325 million is a recognition of the importance of funding the university, but I want to hit on why supporting the Regents' request of \$341 is so critical.

The Regents FY18 budget proposed a \$16.3 million increase to cover strategic investment categories - student recruitment and retention, critical facilities maintenance, competitive research capacity, K-12 education partnerships, and workforce and economic development - necessary to increase enrollment and retention, expand research capability and meet critical state needs. I support the regents long-term vision – their 10-year glide path as it is described – to gradually reduce reliance on state appropriations and build more university-generated revenue. This is critical for long-term sustainability, but cannot happen overnight and cannot happen with continual downward budget pressures.

Continued support of the TVEP funding authorization and Alaska Scholars Program also play into the long-term success for the university. So too will finally resolving the long standing land grant deficit. I look to your leadership and support in all of these critical areas of investment.

I have faith in the faculty, staff and leadership of the University of Alaska and believe that through greater collaboration and the successful completion of the Strategic Pathways process we will become a more efficient, stronger university meeting Alaska's needs. This is a turning point for the university and the state, and investment in the university today will support a more prosperous Alaska in the future.

Thank you,

Monique Musick
Ester, AK 99725

#55

Pat Holmes

Kodiak, AK

Issue: Budget has been cut too much

I would like to thank you folks for your sponsorship of this bill and for trying to find solutions. You handle your hearings in a very positive and gentlemanly way. Testifying to your committee was a different experience from those where the chair has a picked slate of testimony from constituents from their district, or selected speakers are allowed lengthy periods to testify; rural folks (especially those with a message counter to the chair's philosophy) are given a 2 or 3 minute limit.

Your style is reminiscent of the early legislatures (1st 20 yrs?), before big oil. My memory slips a bit... It seemed like the Democrats were often in control yet **both parties sought consensus and compromise; we always had a balanced budget.** Priorities were: education, public safety, transportation(including ferries) and Fish and game. A lot of folks (newcomers since state hood) chose to forget that management of our fishies was a Major state hood issue and remains our state's largest private employer.

Oil has been a major economic boost and has made many capital projects and new programs benefit the state; and some tremendous boondoggle's as well. While there was a huge increase in private sector employment; most of the jobs went to "outside folks", boomers who made their huge wages and still hope for more. Seems like the emphasis in recent years has been cutting state operational funds more than the capital budget or Oil incentives. With the oil productive capacity of North America: US, Canada and Mexico; it doubtful (barring war) that oil values will increase for a long time!

My wife and I feel that the operational budget has been cut too much. It is time to raise revenues for the long term benefit of Alaskans. **Your bill is a good start.** Have you considered including the old "head tax for education" .. Didn't it used to be \$25?

It's time to support folks who are here for the long run. Most fishermen, small business, teachers and state employees are folks that have been here most of their lives, or born and bred. Most will probably die here. The boomers will continue to exit to the oil belt when times are tough.

My hat is off to you folks, though my bald head will freeze in this wind.

Good luck in your endeavors.

Sincerely

Pat Holmes,

Kodiak

#56

Corinne Trish

Koyuk, AK

Issue: Education

> I am writing to both Donny Olson and Neal Foster, my representatives. I would STRONGLY urge them to not vote for a reduction of there education budget. I have taught in the Norton Sound Region, in Koyuk, 26 years and I know how hard it is to continue to provide a quality education to rural students with the current budget. We are hurting our students if we reduce the budget, and the kids will suffer. As a teacher I work hard to provide a quality education to my third grade students. It is getting more costly through shipping costs, utility and internet cost going up. Please think of your constituents, those people who are under the age of 18 who need you to keep the funding currently or a slight increase. DO NOT reduce our educational budget. I know we need to tighten our belt and cuts need to happen, but don't do it by reducing the future of your constituents for our region and for all students of Alaska.

> Thanks for supporting our region's education constituents.

> Corinne Trish

> Koyuk, AK 99753

#57

Mary Schallert

Issue: School funding

Dear legislatures,

Please do not cut any more of our state budget. We have suffered enough cuts. Public Schools are one of our precious resources. Please see it as such.

Use creative powers, oil money, income tax. There are a lot of folks that work on the slope that pay nothing for their income.

Do not force local communities to pay for what should be found from other places. This current plan will take us into crisis mode. Do you know we have the highest unemployment rate in the country?

Are you willing to make it even worse?

Please consider my words.

Sincerely,

Mary Schallert

Business owner since 1990

Voter since 1973