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SPONSOR STATEMENT

SENATE BILL 131

Appropriating the School Funding Formula by April 1

Senate Bill 131, "An Act relating to a separate appropriation bill for operating expenses for public education and establishing a date by which the bill must be passed by the legislature and transmitted to the governor each year; relating to the budget responsibilities of the governor; and providing for an effective date," would let school districts know the amount of state aide they will be receiving for the succeeding school year, on April 1st of each calendar year.

By state statute (AS 14.14.060), school districts are required to submit funding requests to their municipal governments by May 1st of each year. Notwithstanding a 90-day legislative session that is scheduled to conclude in mid-April, there have been many instances in which the Legislature and the Governor have not passed the state operating budget until well after May 1st. This situation makes it difficult for school districts to prepare an actual financial plan and puts an added burden on local government officials developing their budgets. Over the years, this uncertainty has also forced school districts to layoff educators prematurely only to attempt to hire them again, with equally uncertain success, once the final budget has been approved.

SB 131 solves this dilemma in two ways. Section one of the bill requires the Governor to submit a separate appropriation bill to the Legislature for public elementary and secondary schools before the fourth day of each regular session. It also requires the Legislature to pass and transmit to the Governor a bill a bill to fund public education for the succeeding fiscal year. Section two amends a provision in the Executive Budget Act to reflect that a separate appropriation bill to fund public education be submitted by the Governor as part of the budget package.

School districts throughout Alaska are dealing with many issues including recruiting and retaining teachers, meeting pupil performance standards and inflationary costs. The Legislature can assist school districts by giving them early notice of their respective state funding levels.

Please join me in supporting this important legislation.