

Testimony of David Landis, Mayor of the Ketchikan Gateway Borough

Alaska State Legislature, House Finance meeting of July 9, 2019

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is David Landis, Mayor of the Ketchikan Gateway Borough, the largest municipality in District 36.

As you've heard from others this afternoon, there are wide-ranging impacts from these vetoes, if they stand, and they would deeply affect all Alaskans no matter what their party or political philosophies, and no matter whether they realize it yet are not. I won't repeat all of what has been said by those before me as it applies to our municipality but will note that we have a large University of Alaska footprint here, we have an ever-increasing Medicaid eligible population, and our population receiving senior benefits is also growing. Like Mr. Andreaasen before me, I would emphasize that in large part these vetoes are simply cost shifts to municipalities around the state, and that they also disproportionately impact programs that bring additional revenue, economic activity and jobs to the state. Why on earth would programs that bring in multiple times the amount of funding from non-state sources be targeted ?

Moving to specific impacts to the Ketchikan Gateway Borough, the broken promise of state partnership in school bond debt reimbursement hits us the hardest. This is close to a \$1.2 million hit to the taxpayers of this community, and again this is NOT A CUT! It's a cost shift to this community. Fortunately, this year, the entire program was not eliminated but we expect that this will happen in future years unless something is done to protect it. This community has also been responsible enough where this shift won't break us this year. But in future years can we count on these promises being kept? The fact is that education is squarely named in the constitution as a State responsibility, and it can't be carried out without functioning facilities. The Borough has been responsible in planning on projects such as the needed replacement of a school roof and another school which needs mechanical work. These are in the CIP pipeline now, but now we can't do those projects without drastic revisions of some type. Please remember that other communities in Alaska will be hurt far worse than Ketchikan will be with this particular veto.

The elimination of community assistance, or revenue sharing, will also be a substantial blow to this community but make no mistake, in smaller communities it will be absolutely devastating, and functioning municipal governments will cease to exist.

I'll be honest - I've had serious discussions with citizens here who have raised the issue of dissolving the Borough so that the State can't keep pushing more responsibilities down to local taxpayers and residents. I feel that there's a tipping point that we're rapidly approaching where

Alaska residents will make a calculation whether their quality of life in terms of health, education, welfare, the arts, senior benefits, public radio, management of fish and game, the Marine Highway, and many other basic services are degraded to the point of them leaving the state for good. These are the questions that I'm hearing from our local residents. Quite frankly, I don't know how to answer them. Do you? Please override these vetoes in their entirety. You, the legislature, did the hard work of appropriating, and your work should stand.

Thank you again to the committee for your time and attention. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer.