

My name is Dr. Laos and I'm writing in support of Senate Bill 111. Thank you to the Senate Education committee for ensuring that education and our children are a priority during these unprecedented times. I am testifying today in support of the aforementioned bills' Pre-K and Reading Intervention components. I am excited and thankful to see bipartisan support for both! Our children are a concern that goes beyond party lines. Alaska needs to start investing in infrastructure to support children and youth from birth to school-age and young adulthood. SB 111's inclusion of grants to establish pre-k programs in our school districts and uplifts this much needed and overdue conversation on early childhood education in our state.

Pre-K and Reading Intervention are essential to academic success and building a solid foundation for a healthy, productive future. Pre-K lays the base for reading success and helps children learn to build stronger relationships with their parents, friends, teachers, and neighbors. This groundwork of Pre-K is one of the strongest, upstream investments that can be made. For every dollar invested in high quality preschool, up to \$7 in long-term government expenses can be saved by reducing the need for remedial education, and involvement in the criminal justice and public assistance systems.

I do want to speak to a piece of the bill that could use reflection and adjustment. Hard retention can be harmful to our most vulnerable students. An article in the Journal of Public Economics warns that retained students may be harmed by stigmatization, reduced expectations for their academic performance on the part of teachers and parents, and the challenge of adjusting to a new peer group. Studies in educational psychology confirm that retained students achieve at lower levels, complete fewer years of school, and have worse social-emotional outcomes. Hard retention does not solve Alaska's reading proficiency problems. While our statistics may rise as only the students who meet the standards are able to move on and be counted, underperforming students are left behind and unreported.

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