

Thank you Madam Chair for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 147 my name is Madelene Reichard. My yupik name is Arnaucuaq, I am named after Arnaucuaq Angiak from Tununak Alaska who was a storyteller, which is why I think I talk so much. So I will try to keep it brief today.

- I am a teacher here in Bethel at Ayaprun Elitnaurvik, our yupik charter school.

I was born and raised here in Bethel and am incredibly proud to have grown up in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta. I attended elementary, middle and high school here before graduating from Bethel Regional High School in 2011.

-Prior to graduating in the fall of 2010, the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) selected me for their future teacher candidate scholarship, they submitted my name to the State of Alaska through the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) to be considered for the Teacher Education Loan (TEL) Program.

-I was subsequently accepted into the TEL program. Where was mutually agreed upon that if I returned to rural Alaska to teach for 4 years that the TEL loan would be forgiven in full, and any payments I had made towards the loan would be returned to me.

-I attended the University of Oregon and received my Bachelor of Science in Educational Foundations. I then continued into an accelerated program in which I also earned my Master's Degree in Curriculum and Teaching, with a special focus in elementary education and English as a second language.

-Upon graduating in 2016, I happily accepted a teaching position with LKSD at the Bethel Regional High School. After one year there, I accepted a new position at Ayaprun Elitnaurvik where I am currently teaching, right now Kindergarten-6th grade art and English Language Development.

-Mrs. Hankins and Mr. Daniel can speak more to this but My school is a Title 1 Yup'ik Immersion Charter school wherein 90% of our students are Alaska Native. We focus on language and cultural education and preservation as well as western education.

-Teacher retention has been a long-standing issue within rural communities. For some rural districts the teacher turnover rate is as high as 50-80% per year, as you have heard recently and this revolving door of teachers leaving has detrimental effects on students in our area. Growing up as a student here, the turnover of teachers is very evident. It is disruptive. You lack consistency. You miss out on opportunities to build trust and focus on learning because you are constantly having to adapt

-Having to frequently reintroduce yourself and learning needs as well as readjust to new teachers every year, especially ones who do not understand or value the cultural background you come from, is exhausting.

- It was very important to me to come home and teach to provide another stable, consistent influence for kids that grew up just like me. I want to show that kids from our community can

succeed. Having local teachers who understand your language, your culture, the community removes a barrier and allows you to be in a better starting position as a teacher. I was especially enthusiastic to return to the state of Alaska and specifically Bethel, because it's my home and I want to give back to the community that has always supported me. One of my favorite parts of my job is getting to work with families I have known my whole life or to build relationships with new families getting to watch their children learn and grow from kindergarten to junior high.

-After my first year of teaching I applied for forgiveness from ACPE as I had been instructed. I was shocked when I received a letter back from the ACPE stating I had not been approved for forgiveness, because my school was not in a rural community. According to AS 14.43.700, "rural means a community with a population of 5,500 or less that is not connected by road or rail to Anchorage or Fairbanks...".

-These population guidelines were originally set the year I was born, which as my students like to constantly remind me... was a very long time ago, left no room for population growth or any language allowing for mirroring of Federal or other state guidelines.

-Bethel does not technically meet the population component of the definition.. However, I would note that because of its remote location "not connected by road or rail to Anchorage or Fairbanks," it is clear to anyone who has lived, worked, or visited Bethel that it is, in fact, a very rural community.

-The goal of programs like the LKSD scholarship and TEL is to create homegrown teachers. The programs are meant to help improve teacher retention by encouraging local students to become teachers and return to their home communities.

- That is why this issue is consequential not only for me but for all rural students who wish to become teachers in the future. If we as a state plan to truly invest in the future of education, this program would benefit from a rewrite. During this pandemic we have seen teacher retention rates taken an even greater hit and we owe it to our kids to do better for them. I have spoken to Department Directors, The Commissioner of Education and even the Governor himself, everyone was equally confused and in support of the definition changing to reflection what is accurate.

-I am a proud public school educator committed to the education of students in the YK delta but I am also just a kid from Bethel, asking for the state of Alaska to hold up the end of their promise so I can continue to hold up my side of teaching these awesome kids in this strong, resilient community.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on this bill  
I stand ready to answer any questions from the committee.

End of statement