

From: [Chelsea Burke](#)
To: [Senate Finance Committee](#)
Subject: Public Testimony on SB 178 – Expand Early Intervention Services
Date: Friday, February 27, 2026 3:51:55 PM

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Chelsea Burke. I live in Eagle River. I am the parent of four school-aged children, and my youngest son has a developmental disability. I previously served as a Governor-appointed member of the Alaska Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education and now serve as council staff.

I am writing in strong support of SB 178, which expands eligibility for Alaska's Infant Learning Program (ILP) from a 50% developmental delay to a 25% delay and increases funding to support that expansion.

Currently, Alaska has the most restrictive eligibility criteria in the nation. A two-year-old must be functioning at the level of a one-year-old to qualify for services. SB 178 would align ILP eligibility with the 25% delay standard already used in K-12 special education. There is no evidence-based rationale for continuing to deny services to children who clearly need support but do not meet that extremely high threshold.

My youngest son began receiving early intervention services at age two. Those services were life-changing for our family. At the time, we were living in Delta Junction and utilizing childcare at Fort Greely. Through ILP, he was able to receive itinerant services directly in his childcare setting. That flexibility was critical. It allowed both parents to remain in the workforce while ensuring consistency in his therapies; not just at home but embedded in his preschool environment.

Those early services led to a formal diagnosis and helped streamline his transition from early intervention into preschool special education and then into school-age services. Today, he is almost 14 years old. He is independent, communicative, and thriving. He still receives special education services and likely always will need some level of support. But his needs have significantly decreased over time. His service ratio has lowered. He requires fewer behavioral interventions. He needs less supervision. He can now communicate his wants and needs, which has dramatically reduced frustration and aggression.

I directly attribute that progress to early intervention beginning at age two.

Research supports what families already know: early intervention works. National data shows that 46% of children who receive early intervention meet developmental expectations by kindergarten and do not require special education. Each child who avoids special education represents an estimated savings of \$229,071 over their educational career. Expansion is projected to result in 152 additional children per year who may not require special education services, representing significant long-term savings.

Brain development is most rapid and flexible from birth to age three. Intervention is more effective and less costly when provided early rather than delayed. SB 178 ensures children receive services during that critical developmental window instead of waiting until delays become more severe and more expensive to address.

This bill is not just compassionate policy, it is fiscally responsible policy. It strengthens families, supports workforce participation, reduces future reliance on special education and Medicaid, and improves long-term outcomes.

As a parent who has lived this experience, I can say without hesitation: early intervention changes trajectories.

I respectfully urge you to support SB 178 and expand access to the Infant Learning Program for Alaska's youngest children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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