



Representative Andi Story

Alaska State Legislature

Sponsor Statement

House Joint Resolution 45

“Urging the United States Congress to fully fund The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act”

Considered one of the most important pieces of federal education legislation of our time, the passage of Public Law 94-142 (PL-142), the “Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975,” mandated that public schools provide a “Free and Appropriate Education” (FAPE) to eligible children with disabilities. The act also required a tailored “Individualized Education Program” (IEP) in the least restrictive environment, thus “mainstreaming” children to ensure that all children are educated alongside their peers to the extent possible. At the same time, Congress committed to funding 40 percent of the average per-pupil cost of special education.

Public Law 94-142 improved the lives of millions of children and their families and reshaped the educational landscape for children with disabilities. Congress reauthorized and expanded the law in 1990, renaming it the “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act” (IDEA). The reauthorization expanded early intervention, transition services, access to related service providers, inclusion in the general curriculum, participation in state and district assessments, and school accountability. It changed the federal funding requirement to pay up to 40 percent for the average per-pupil cost of special education.

Unfortunately, IDEA’s value is being undermined by chronic federal underfunding. Actual funding has historically been far lower than the 40% requirement, often around 10 to 15 percent of the original Act. The shortfall has created an unfunded mandate, shifting the cost burden to states and local governments. The result has been larger caseloads, educator burnout, difficulty recruiting and retaining specialized staff, worried parents, frustrated administrators, and reduced services for students, at times replacing in-person support with web-based or online services. Litigation has also become a worrisome aspect of IDEA.

In Alaska, these pressures are even greater. Our districts already face high costs, workforce shortages, and the challenges of serving students across rural and remote communities. The federal government should not shift this fiscal responsibility onto states and local districts after setting the national standard and creating the legal obligation.

HJR 45 sends a simple message asking Congress to honor its commitment to funding IDEA at 40 percent, as initially legislated. Fully funding IDEA is an investment in children, families, equity, and fundamental human rights. Therefore, we urge passage of Congressional House Resolution 2598, a glide path incremental funding bill or the full funding of IDEA now.

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