



April 13, 2026

To: The House Education Committee

Written Testimony – SB 23 (Civics Education)

From: Lon Garrison, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB)

Co-Chairs Himschoot and Story, and members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Lon Garrison, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 23.

Initially, AASB endorses SB 23's goal. We believe that equipping students to participate knowledgeably in a democracy is a core aim of public education. Skills such as civic responsibility, understanding government structures, and thoughtful community engagement are crucial outcomes for every student. This is clearly expressed in AASB's Belief Statement B.23, emphasizing that a healthy democracy relies on the ability of our public schools to prepare students for active and informed citizenship.

SB 23 takes an important step in reinforcing that purpose. By ensuring that students receive instruction in civics and demonstrate proficiency through coursework, assessment, or project-based learning, the bill elevates the importance of civic education alongside other academic priorities. AASB particularly appreciates the flexibility provided in the bill, allowing districts to determine how students meet the requirement. The inclusion of project-based assessments is especially valuable, as it allows students to demonstrate civic knowledge and skills through real-world application—an approach that aligns with our support for authentic assessment practices.

The bill also aligns with AASB's 2026 Legislative Priority to support student achievement and wellness. A well-rounded education includes not only academic proficiency, but also the development of engaged, informed citizens who are prepared to contribute to their communities and to Alaska's future.

Meanwhile, we would like to present some considerations for the committee as you proceed with this legislation.

First, AASB remains mindful of the cumulative impact of new requirements placed on school districts. While SB 23 provides flexibility in implementation, it does establish a new statewide graduation requirement. Districts will need to ensure curriculum alignment, provide instruction,



administer assessments or oversee project-based demonstrations, and document student completion. These activities carry real costs in terms of staff time, training, and administrative capacity. As you know, **AASB has consistently emphasized that new expectations should be accompanied by adequate resources.** We encourage the committee to carefully consider the potential for SB 23 to function as an unfunded mandate.

Second, we encourage continued attention to local control. Alaska's school districts are diverse in size, geography, culture, and community priorities. The strength of this bill is that it allows districts flexibility in how they deliver civics education and how students demonstrate proficiency. Maintaining that flexibility will be critical to ensuring that civics instruction remains relevant, culturally responsive, and locally meaningful for students across the state.

Finally, we encourage thoughtful implementation of any assessment components associated with this bill. The option for project-based assessment is a strong feature, and we would encourage the state to prioritize approaches that emphasize student engagement and applied learning, rather than adding unnecessary layers to existing testing systems. AASB is especially concerned that an unintended consequence of this bill's new graduation requirement could create barriers for some students. We want to avoid the foibles of the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE).

In closing, AASB supports the intent and direction of SB 23. Strengthening civics education is an important investment in Alaska's future and in the health of our democratic institutions. As the bill moves forward, we respectfully urge the committee to ensure that implementation preserves local flexibility and accounts for the real costs to school districts.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to Alaska's students.