

From: [Gunderson, Megan](#)
To: [Senate Finance Committee](#)
Subject: Public Testimony for HB 78 from Megan Gunderson (Valdez, AK)
Date: Thursday, April 16, 2026 9:32:48 AM

Chair and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. My name is Megan Gunderson, and I serve as the Director of Technology and Communication for Valdez City Schools.

I have spent my entire career in Alaska's public system. I taught in rural Alaska for ten years under TRS Tier 3, worked for the University of Alaska under PERS Tier 4 for four years, and I now serve as a school district administrator, again contributing to my Tier 3 TRS plan. I share this background because this bill is not theoretical for me—it is highly personal.

Right now, people in my position—mid-career educators and public employees—are paying very close attention to this bill. These are individuals who have already committed to Alaska. We have built careers here and put down roots. We are raising our families (and the next generation of Alaskans) in a state we so dearly love. At the same time, we are at a point where we must make decisions about the next 10 to 20 years of our lives.

When I listen to hearings or read coverage on this issue, I often hear elected officials question whether retirement structure truly influences the decisions of public employees. There is a perception that early-career educators are not yet concerned with retirement, and that mid-career professionals will simply stay the course because they already have for many years. That has not been my experience.

Throughout my 17 years as a public employee in Alaska, conversations about retirement have been constant among colleagues. The questions are not hypothetical—they are immediate and ongoing: Do I stay, or do I go? Do I invest more years here in work I believe in, or do I leave early enough to rebuild a meaningful retirement elsewhere? The conversation almost inevitably ends with, Am I selfish if I choose long-term security? What will happen to those I leave behind? Why do I have to choose between Alaska and my family at all?

For many of us, having the option to choose a defined benefit plan would make staying the clear choice. Without it, some will leave earlier than they otherwise would—not because they want to, but because financially, they feel they have to. And not all of that loss means leaving Alaska. Some will remain in the state but move to private employers that offer stronger retirement security. Some will retire on their TRS Tier 3 or PERS Tier 4 plan as soon as they can, to start another career that can supplement their retirement to a livable sum. Either way, our public systems lose experienced professionals.

I believe in Alaska. I grew up a Coast Guard brat, moving around the country every few years; I could live anywhere and be happy enough. However, I've chosen to build my life and career **here, in Alaska**. I choose to raise my kids **here, in Alaska**. I often tell people that the greatest gift I will ever give my children is a childhood in Valdez, Alaska. **Alaska is special.** But if we want experienced educators and public employees to remain and continue investing in our Alaskan communities, we must ensure that long-term commitment is sustainable for our workforce. We have seen for two decades that great people reluctantly leave what is special to find security and stability.

I urge you to move HB 78 to the floor before the session ends. This issue has lingered for years, and a pattern has developed—financial experts provide analysis, late changes introduce division in committee, the bill stalls, the session ends, and public employee confidence in staying in Alaska erodes further. At first, this session truly felt different. It felt like the legislature was truly listening to its public employee constituents and expert financial advice. However, the Senate Finance Committee’s late amendment of an additional 2% employer contribution for PERS employees who choose the defined benefit plan raises concerns that we may be returning to that familiar pattern.

I understand the desire to address long-term fiscal risk. However, this change raises questions about whether the solution is being overcorrected beyond what actuarial analysis supports. Public employers across Alaska have voiced support for this bill, recognizing its importance for recruitment and retention. At some point, continuing to add costs to employers past actuarial recommendation risks undermining the very goal of the legislation—keeping experienced public employees in our system.

Furthermore, it also creates the perception that the bill is being adjusted in ways that make passage less likely. While that may not be the intention, past experience suggests it could lead to that outcome regardless. I ask that you amend the current version of HB 78 to remove the recent employer contribution increase to 24% and establish the rate back to the original 22% employer contribution for PERS employees. **Most importantly, I ask that this bill make it to the floor for a vote this session.**

For thousands of public employees, this is the bill we check on each day. This is the bill that gives us the most hope and yields the greatest chance at long-term security. For Alaska’s future, this is one of the most consequential bills of the 34th legislature.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

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