

Alaska State Legislature

House Education Committee

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Sponsor Statement

House Joint Resolution 45 (34-LS 1551\I)
“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 were educated alongside their peers to the fullest extent possible. At the same time, Congress committed to fund 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. In recognition of its success, 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.

Unfortunately, its value of IDEA is being undermined by chronic federal underfunding. Although the law authorized the federal government to pay up to 40 percent of the additional cost of educating students with disabilities, actual funding has historically been far lower, often around 10 to 15 percent. The shortfall has created an unfunded mandate that states and local governments must cover. The result has been larger caseloads, educator burnout, difficulty recruiting and retaining specialized staff, worried parents, frustrated administrators, and reduced services for students, sometimes even replacing in-person support with web-based or online services because districts cannot afford more.

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 its 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 fully funding IDEA at 40 percent. Fully funding IDEA is an investment in children, families, equity, and fundamental human rights.