



Denali Borough School District

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19 February 2025

Representative Kopp,

My name is Dan Polta. I am the superintendent of the Denali Borough School District and a member of the Teacher Retirement System, Tier 2.

I support the re-design of the current public employee and teacher retirement systems in Alaska to return to a defined benefit system.

Our current retirement system must change because it is critically, and dangerously flawed. I'll speak more towards the teacher system as I have more direct experience with TRS rather than PERS but the same overarching issues apply.

Our Alaskan teachers do not participate in social security and so do not earn that base line of security and guarantee that almost all workers in our country receive. While some teachers will qualify for social security now that the Windfall Elimination Provision has been repealed, many who work their entire careers as teachers in Alaska will not. Our teachers, and all public servants, deserve the assurance of a minim floor for retirement. Our current defined contribution system does not do that.

Several bills to redesign TRS and PERS have been introduced, such as HB78 and SB28, to name only two. I'll avoid going deep into the weeds and simply emphasize the need to provide employees with a reason to work their careers in service to our State.

Recently one of my colleagues, Roy Getchell, Haines Superintendent, announced his resignation after seven years and his plans to return to the Lower 48. In the Chilkat Valley News article in October 2024, Superintendent Getchell made it clear that the reason he is leaving Alaska is tied to a defined benefit retirement plan in Colorado. Alaska is losing a great educator because of concerns with retirement. Roy was the Alaska Superintendent of the year last school year. I might be more familiar with his story than the countless other teachers, firefighters, troopers, etc. who have made or will make a similar decision to leave Alaska based on their family's security in retirement.

Please continue your discussions to fix the flaws in our current system so we can offer our public servants a system that provides needed guarantees while at the same time is cost effective, affordable, and financially sound for all parties, the State, the employer, and the employee.

Mission Statement

Working together to nurture, empower, and inspire today's student to positively shape tomorrow's world

Thank you again for your consideration of this important issue and for seeking to improve the working conditions for all our public servants.

Sincerely,

Dan Polta

Dan Polta

Superintendent, Denali Borough School District

Technical aspects/suggestions

Continue to hold the employer contribution rates stable for non-state employers.

Create a design that allows participants to move between PERS and TRS (HB78 includes language that facilitates this transition). This will help our skilled teaching assistants move into classroom teaching positions.

Adjust the retirement age in PERS/TRS to match that of social security or Medicare. This will encourage employees to continue serving our students throughout their entire careers, rather than using the retirement benefit to support a mid-life career change

Reduce the per year additive percentage of pre-retirement income provide in retirement. This will reduce the cost of the program to the State and employer, and encourage the employee to take individual, personal actions to secure retirement such as opening a Roth or Traditional IRA.

Consider inclusion of support for an employer sponsored plan such as helping the employer match employee contributions to a 403b account. This would be very beneficial to teachers who cannot participate in the supplemental benefits system (SBS) which all state employees and many non-teacher, non-state public employees participate in.

(These last two measures can help increase the need for the employee to take individual steps and responsibilities in order to provide for his/her full retirement dreams while the State and employer helps ensure a basic level of dignitary in retirement.)



Mayor
Suzanne LaFrance

Anchorage Fire Department



Fire Chief
Douglas Schrage

The Honorable Representative Chuck Kopp
State Capitol Room 204
Juneau, AK 99801

January 31, 2025

Representative Kopp:

Thank you for supporting House Bill 78 to address the problem of Alaska's highly trained and experienced firefighters leaving Alaska for states with more attractive retirement plans. This legislation could stem the outmigration of firefighters who are being actively recruited by fire departments in other states. The portability of our Tier IV retirement plan makes Alaska's firefighters ripe for headhunting by other employers.

The challenge we are experiencing is firefighters leaving for fire departments Outside after they become vested in Tier IV. These firefighters are taking with them years of experience, skills, and knowledge. These are firefighters - including long-time Alaskans - in whom we had invested over a year of intensive training. The fire departments they are going to offer lateral hiring and therefore avoid the cost of initial training.

In particular, we have had great difficulty hiring enough trained paramedics to maintain adequate staffing. We are competing with fire departments all over the U.S. for a limited pool of paramedics. We simply aren't competitive because of the lack of a defined benefit pension. We now send current employees to paramedic school at considerable personnel and tuition expense. It takes a year of schooling, on top of basic firefighter training, to become a licensed paramedic.

The loss of experienced firefighters that we spent months recruiting and training is an even bigger burden to smaller city and rural departments. For these, the loss of a single firefighter represents a significant financial and operational deficit, as they seek to recruit and train a replacement while maintaining adequate coverage to their communities.

Thank you for considering solutions to arrest the outmigration of Alaska's firefighters and reduce costs to local communities.

Respectfully,

Gloria Susan Levi

[REDACTED]
Anchorage, AK 99515
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

January 14, 2025

Kathy Giessel
Alaska State Senate
Chuck Kopp
Alaska State House

Senator Giessel and Representative Kopp:

At the present time, the State of Alaska is having a hard time finding quality workers. One of the reasons – and a shortcoming in the hiring process – is former state workers such as myself, have to give up our state retirement to work for the State of Alaska again.

This is not a good idea.

If the State of Alaska wants the best possible employees, particularly for supervisory positions and jobs that require a great depth of knowledge and experience, HR should NOT require returning, retired state workers to give up their state retirement for a 'new job.'

I would appreciate your consideration on this issue.

Sincerely,

Gloria (Sue) Levi
Gloria "Susan" Levi

Keep up the good work!

From: [Jacob Bera](#)
To: [Rep. Elect Chuck Kopp](#); [REDACTED]
Subject: Public Employee Retirement This Legislative Session
Date: Monday, January 20, 2025 10:18:59 PM

Monday January 20th, 2025

Good evening Representative Kopp,

Welcome back to the Legislature and thank you for serving! I also want to thank you for your leadership on improving the retirement plans for public employees. My name is Jacob Bera, and my wife and I are both educators. We moved to Alaska in 2003 after I finished serving in the Marine Corps Reserve and completing my undergraduate degree. Since that time, our family has grown with the addition of our three children: Leif, Lilli and Skade. I've always dreamed of raising a family here, and it's been rewarding to watch our Alaskan born and raised children learn to climb mountains, fish for salmon, and attend public schools.



A large part of our ability to stay in Alaska, provide a better life for our children, and dedicate our professional lives to public education has been the financial security that comes from the defined benefit retirement (pension) we're building. My wife and I are part of the Tier 2

Teacher Retirement System (TRS), and we've contributed to that plan for the past 21+ years. And even though we were initially concerned about our inability to contribute to Social Security here in Alaska, we've tried to supplement our retirement savings in other ways.

I cannot emphasize enough how important our pension is to our willingness to stay in Alaska. It gives us a strong incentive to stay and work here. When SB 141 was passed in 2006 and new public employees could no longer earn a pension, we questioned whether or not we would be able to stay here if we were under that plan. And through the years we've watched too many of our colleagues and friends ultimately make the decision to leave Alaska so they could start working towards a better retirement somewhere else before it was too late. In doing so, they also took the little retirement savings they had in their defined contribution plans, along with their employer's contributions.

Other efforts that would allow educators to participate in the Social Security or Supplemental Employee Benefits Programs are also greatly productive, and I appreciate Representative Saddler (HB 38) and others for contributing these ideas in good faith. But ultimately, the move from a defined contribution to a defined benefit pension for a public employee's main retirement savings is what's needed most to address the recruitment and retention issues we face from all public sector employees in Alaska...not just teachers.

Again, thank you for your leadership on this important issue. Please know that I am willing to continue the conversation, and please reach out anytime if I can share my perspective or contribute to your understanding of any other educational issues. I greatly respect your willingness to take time away from family and friends to serve in Juneau. And regardless of party or politics, I sincerely wish you the very best this legislative session.

Very respectfully,

Jacob Bera

[REDACTED]

Chugiak, Alaska [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: [Scott Hayden](#)
To: [Sen. Cathy Giessel](#); [Rep. Elect Chuck Kopp](#)
Subject: School funding/pensions
Date: Thursday, December 19, 2024 10:52:04 AM

Good Morning,

I have been reading about the Governor's intention to pair funding increases with school reforms. I think the school reforms are probably the ones that failed to pass last year because they were a bad idea. I am opposed to the Governor's reforms. But I am hopeful that you all can override his inevitable veto of restored school funding.

I say restored and not increased because I remember when 23 students was the standard elementary class size, and we paired that with sufficient funding. Today it is closer to 30. Inflation has been starving our schools for decades.

The Governor is going to say that we have declining test scores. To him I say, "If you don't like the result, don't produce the cause." If you want good test scores, hire enough teachers and staff to give each student the attention they need to succeed. I know you both favor these things, and I want you to remember that voters favor them too - that's why we got rid of several extremists in the elections, including Rep Craig Johnson.

I am also strongly in favor of Senator Giessel's plan for a state pension system. She is right that we are losing talented public servants to places where they are paid a living wage and can earn a retirement.

The deal with working in the public sector is supposed to be that you earn less but you have great security. Now the plan is earn less and have *less* security? It's not the deal we as a society should be offering them. No Social Security AND no pension? It's messed up.

I want to squeeze in one last issue. Please continue your support for renewable energy projects in the state. The natural gas pipeline is a pipe dream - an expensive one. Even the pipeline working group said that without progress their work should wind down at the end of this year. There has been no progress, only more empty promises and boondoggle spending by AIDEA. If we want real energy independence, it is going to have to be through balancing increases in natural gas exploration on the rail belt and increased renewable energy projects.

I voted for both of you because I knew you would form a coalition government, which I strongly favor. No one party has a monopoly on good ideas. Thank you both for your hard work on behalf of Alaska.

Scott Hayden

[REDACTED]

Anchorage AK 99515