
From: Ann Rappoport [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, March 01, 2025 4:46 PM
To: House Finance
Subject: Fwd: Please pass HB 78 to provide defined benefits for public employees!

Hello House Finance Committee -

Unfortunately I did not see the email below about the need to send my letter to the Committee email address for it to be entered as testimony for last Thursday's hearing on HB 78. However, I had sent it to all of the Committee members as you can see in my email at the bottom. I hope you can enter my concerns, as copied below, into the record.

Thank you, Ann Rappoport

Dear Members of the House Finance Committee -

I understand you will be having a hearing covering HB 78 today. As you know, Alaska is currently suffering a brain drain as too many of our youth leave for college and don't return because of the lack of good jobs with retirement benefits. We have also steadily been losing population as talented employees in our schools, fire departments, police, public health care, and other systems (including the valuable administrators for those departments) leave Alaska after a few years for better opportunities and better retirement systems Outside! Instead of retaining talent that has become even more valuable with a little experience, it is draining away - along with their families, and then a further trickle down as private businesses have fewer customers.

It is past time to provide our valuable public employees with a defined benefit retirement plan! HB 78 will do that and has been carefully crafted to minimize the risks to both the state and the employee. Let's build back Alaska - we all know we are so fortunate to live in such a magnificent place, we just need the valuable workers to educate our children, keep us safe and healthy, and care for our state public lands.

I am sorry I am unable to testify in person today; I appreciate your consideration of my comments.

Sincerely,

From: Ann Rappoport <agrappoport@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, February 27, 2025 10:16 AM

To: Rep. Andy Josephson <Rep.Andy.Josephson@akleg.gov>; Rep. Calvin Schrage <Rep.Calvin.Schrage@akleg.gov>; Rep. Neal Foster <Rep.Neal.Foster@akleg.gov>; Rep. Alyse Galvin <Rep.Alyse.Galvin@akleg.gov>; Rep. Sara Hannan <Rep.Sara.Hannan@akleg.gov>; Rep. Nellie Jimmie <Rep.Nellie.Jimmie@akleg.gov>; Rep. Will Stapp <Rep.Will.Stapp@akleg.gov>; Rep. DeLena Johnson <Rep.DeLena.Johnson@akleg.gov>; Rep. Frank Tomaszewski <Rep.Frank.Tomaszewski@akleg.gov>; Rep. Jamie Allard <Rep.Jamie.Allard@akleg.gov>; Rep. Jeremy Bynum <Rep.Jeremy.Bynum@akleg.gov>

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Sincerely,

Ann Rappoport



Anchorage, AK 99516

From: David Frazier [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 27, 2025 9:33 AM
To: House Finance
Subject: HB 78I and the majority

I and the majority of Alaskans are opposed to HB 78. The current pension system has been successful. If a state employee wishes to enhance their retirement fund they can do so through many tax deferred methods. Let retirement savings be up to the worker like the private sector.

David Frazier

[REDACTED]

Anchorage Alaska

[REDACTED]

House Finance Committee

Supporting HB 78-Defined Benefit Retirement System for Public Employees and Teachers.

February 11, 2025

Chair Foster and members of the House Finance Committee. My name is Lon Garrison. I serve as the Executive Director of the Association of Alaska School Boards. We are a nonprofit association established in 1954, serving 52 of Alaska's 54 school districts. Thank you for this opportunity to speak today in support of **HB78 DEFINED BENEFIT OPTION**.

AASB's Board of Directors has adopted three legislative priorities for the year. They are:

- Sufficient, sustained, and predictable education funding
- Retention and recruitment of teachers, administrators, and staff
- Student wellness and safety

These priorities and the supporting resolutions and beliefs of the AASB membership are appended to my written testimony.

AASB has consistently advocated for a defined benefit program as the best choice for staff retirement investments. In 2005, the AASB membership passed a resolution and has continued to strongly support the reinstatement of a defined benefit option.

4.7 RELATING TO DEFINED BENEFIT RETIREMENT

AASB supports re-establishment of a defined benefit retirement program that improves the hiring and retention of highly qualified and effective staff.

Adopted 2005

Amended 2008, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019

School districts are grappling with a persistent crisis in retaining qualified teachers and staff due to inadequate funding, challenging work and living conditions, and benefits that often are not competitive with other states. This undermines our capacity to deliver quality education to Alaskan students and complicates school boards' efforts to meet the state's obligation for public education each day.

One of the most critical factors in a student's success is the quality of the educator working with them. While effective learning relies on having a high-quality teacher, it is essential for the entire school system to support this vital interaction between a teacher and a student. This requires assistance from a variety of school staff to help in the learning experience. Thus, a wide variety of staff will be affected by moving to a defined benefit program.

School boards statewide are encountering unprecedented challenges in allocating rapidly diminishing resources. The shortage of applicants, combined with insufficient funding, leads to staff shortages that worsen the situation. The absence of a defined benefit retirement option hinders Alaska's capability to attract and retain needed public service employees.



Several districts have had to turn to either the J-1 or H-1B visa programs for the last few years to fill teacher vacancies with international staff. Both of these programs have been used as stop-gap measures to fill teaching vacancies with qualified professionals. These are short-term solutions and may come with significant risk depending on the federal administration's perspective on immigration.

HB 78 aims to reinstate a new retirement system that encourages educational professionals to dedicate their careers to serving in Alaska. HB 78 incorporates lessons from the past, shares risks among participants, and establishes retirement age and qualification standards that align better with current needs. Additionally, HB 78 maintains the current contribution rates from school districts for PERS and TRS, which is a positive development. It's important to recognize that school districts, municipalities, and boroughs continue to face challenges of supplying these contributions when state and federal funding is unpredictable and insufficient.

A couple of years ago, during a meeting facilitated by AASB between school board members and their legislators, a legislator asked, "What is the difference between spending and investment?" School board members often refer to investment in staff and students. A board member replied, "Investment implies an expectation of a beneficial dividend or outcome, while spending is merely a response to an expense." In our view, a competitive and attractive defined benefit program is an investment in recruiting and retaining quality staff, which leads to improved student outcomes.

AASB urges the Legislature to be responsive to this critical need. This is one tool in our toolbox that helps make Alaska more competitive in the public sector job market. This is an investment in our students, our communities, and the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Lon D. Garrison,
Executive Director, AASB

4.5 ADDRESSING THE TEACHER, ADMINISTRATOR, SCHOOL STAFF SHORTAGE

The Association of Alaska School Boards urges the Alaska State Legislature, Alaska State Board of Education, and Teacher Education Programs in Alaska's universities to address the severe shortage of teachers, administrators, and school staff in the State of Alaska. Suggested strategies may include:

- Increasing the Base Student Allocation and ensuring that it keeps up with inflation so that school districts can offer competitive salary and benefit packages to retain and recruit administrators, teachers, and school staff;
- Incentives (salary bonuses, student loan forgiveness, student loan assumption, competitive retirement benefits, student loan interest rate reduction, etc.);
- State supported marketing and licensure assistance to recruit teachers;
- Flexibility in certification requirements and reciprocity;
- Alternative routes to teacher certification;
- Improved access to technology including bandwidth and knowledgeable staff;
- Increasing availability and/or quality of teacher housing, including state subsidized teacher housing
- Mentoring programs for student teachers, new teachers, administrators, and school staff, including Type-M certified teachers;
- Streamline the rehire of retired teachers administrators, and school staff
- Professional support/development;
- Eliminate redundant or unnecessary paperwork.
- Increasing awareness about the lives and communities of Alaska's children.
- A defined benefit retirement system
- Utilize research on system supports that promote teacher retention.
- Train more Alaska students as educators; and
- Seek training opportunities for staff and high school students to increase the pool of qualified staff who are representative of the diverse population they teach.

Rationale. It has been painfully demonstrated that a severe shortage of teachers, specialists, and administrators is being experienced in the school districts in every region of Alaska. Attracting and retaining quality teachers has become a critical issue facing school districts as they work to improve education in Alaska's public schools.

A teacher's job satisfaction is gauged by a number of factors, including a sense of accomplishment, professional support, decent living conditions, and adequate compensation/benefits. The degree to which Alaska meets these needs is a statement of the value we place on our educators.

Adopted 1999

Amended 2000, 2001, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2023

Renewed 2020

(Sunsets 2025)

4.7 RELATING TO DEFINED BENEFIT RETIREMENT

AASB supports re-establishment of a defined benefit retirement program that improves the hiring and retention of highly qualified and effective staff.

Rationale. Secure retirement benefits are important for recruiting the best personnel to Alaska schools. Without competitive work benefits, it has become increasingly difficult to retain and recruit teachers, administrators and support staff. Districts are investing significant dollars to train staff to deliver world-class instruction and want to retain this knowledge in state to the advantage of our students.

Adopted 2005

Amended 2008, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019, 2023

Renewed 2024

(Sunsets 2029)

Association of Alaska School Boards



AASB's 2025 Legislative Priorities

On behalf of our member school districts statewide, the AASB Board of Directors has adopted three legislative priorities: **Funding, Educators and Students.**

Our Mission: The Association of Alaska School Boards advocates for children and youth by assisting school boards in providing quality public education, focused on student achievement, through effective local governance.

Sufficient and Sustainable Public Education Funding

Sufficient, sustainable and stable funding is required to meet Alaska's obligation to provide quality, public education for every Alaska student. Educating Alaska's youth is the best strategy for successfully meeting and safeguarding Alaska's prosperity.

- ▶ **Increase the Base Student Allocation (BSA)** – AASB strongly advocates for the necessity of increasing the BSA as calculated by Legislative Finance to reflect inflation based on the Alaska-Urban CPI since the last major increase to the BSA in FY2011. From 2011 to 2025, the BSA increased by only \$280 per student (4.9%), while inflation rose by at least 34%. This discrepancy has resulted in severe staff shortages, school closures, and program eliminations.
- ▶ **Incorporate an annual increase in the BSA to account for inflation** – Provide by statute, for an annual increase in the BSA that provides some accounting for annual inflation and drives a philosophy of long-term investment in public education.
- ▶ **Increase funding for student transportation** – Student transportation funding continues to be inadequate. Transportation costs have dramatically increased due to inflation and labor shortages. Transportation funding must increase regularly to keep up with inflation and prevent the use of school district general funds.

Retention and Recruitment of Teachers, Administrators & Staff

School districts face an unprecedented crisis of retaining and recruiting qualified, effective teachers, administrators, and support staff which seriously hinders providing Alaska students with a quality education.

- ▶ **Implement recommendations** - of the Teacher Recruitment & Retention Task Force.
- ▶ **Reinstitute a competitive retirement program** - including both defined benefits and defined contributions.
- ▶ **Invest in teacher housing** - required for nearly all rural school districts.
- ▶ **Grow Alaska teachers and administrators** - work with partners, universities, and apprenticeship programs to improve and expand teacher training programs, teacher-mentor programs, and alternative certification pathways.

Student Wellness and School Safety

Alaska's public school students face a range of challenges that impact their wellness and safety, including academic stress, mental health issues, bullying, violence, sexual abuse, and lack of access to resources like counseling and social services. Violence, neglect, and sexual abuse have increased, resulting in reduced social-emotional well-being and academic achievement.

- ▶ **Address student mental health - Support and fund** mental health services for all Alaskan students, including trauma-engaged practices in Alaska schools.
- ▶ **Prevent student sexual abuse by school staff** - Support the implementation of policies and training regarding professional boundaries between staff and students.
- ▶ **Reduce school and student violence. Support and fund** the needed programs and services that work to improve relationships, communication, respect, and dignity as a few examples.



AASB 2025 Legislative Priorities and Supporting Resolutions

Sufficient and Sustainable Public Education Funding

- ▶ B.7 – EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND FUNDING AS TOP PRIORITY
- ▶ B.9 – MEETING SCHOOL FACILITY NEEDS FOR ALASKA STUDENTS
- ▶ B.10 – FUNDING FOR EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS IN ALASKA
- ▶ 1.4 – OPPOSE SCHOOL VOUCHERS
- ▶ 2.1 – URGING THE TIMELY, PREDICTABILITY, EQUITABLE, AND ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION
- ▶ 2.2 – ENSURING EQUITABLE FUNDING FOR ALASKA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS
- ▶ 2.4 – URGING THE ALASKA LEGISLATURE TO FUND A GRANT PROGRAM FOR SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES
- ▶ 2.6 – RESOURCES TO EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENT THE ALASKA READS ACT
- ▶ 2.8 – BASE STUDENT ALLOCATION INCREASE
- ▶ 2.10 – EDUCATION ENDOWMENT
- ▶ 2.12 – SCHOOL DISTRICT CAPITAL PROJECTS
- ▶ 2.20 – ENERGY COST RELIEF
- ▶ 2.27 – URGING THE CONTINUATION OF FUNDING FOR CAREER AND TECHNICAL (VOCATIONAL) EDUCATION
- ▶ 2.40 – INFLATION-PROOFED BASE STUDENT ALLOCATION (BSA) INVESTMENTS

Retention and Recruitment of Teachers, Administrators & Staff

- ▶ B.19 – ALASKA NATIVE TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND SCHOOL STAFF HIRE AND RETENTION
- ▶ 2.19 – LEGISLATIVE FINANCIAL RELIEF FOR ONGOING TRS AND PERS EMPLOYER INCREASES
- ▶ 2.45 – TEACHER EDUCATION LOAN EXPANSION
- ▶ 4.1 – SUPPORTS FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT
- ▶ 4.2 – ESTABLISHING A NEW TEACHER INCENTIVE PROGRAM FOR ALASKA
- ▶ 4.3 – ALASKA STATEWIDE EDUCATOR MENTORING
- ▶ 4.5 – ADDRESSING THE TEACHER, ADMINISTRATOR, AND SCHOOL STAFF SHORTAGE
- ▶ 4.6 – REPEAL THE SOCIAL SECURITY GOVERNMENT PENSION OFFSET AND WINDFALL ELIMINATION PROVISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATORS
- ▶ 4.7 – RELATING TO DEFINED BENEFIT RETIREMENT
- ▶ 4.10 – ADDRESSING THE PARAPROFESSIONAL SHORTAGE
- ▶ 4.11 – ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO CERTIFY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS
- ▶ 4.14 – TEACHER CERTIFICATION DELAY

Student Wellness and School Safety

- ▶ B.11 – CHILD ADVOCACY MISSION STATEMENT
- ▶ B.15 – PREVENTION/EARLY INTERVENTION
- ▶ B.17 – DECLARING CHILDREN THE TOP PRIORITY OF ALASKA
- ▶ 2.37 – RESOURCES TO EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENT THE ALASKA SAFE CHILDREN'S ACT
- ▶ 2.44 – URGING DEDICATED FUNDING OUTSIDE THE FOUNDATION FORMULA
- ▶ 3.1 – DECLARING CHILDREN OF ALASKA OUR MOST VALUABLE RESOURCE
- ▶ 3.2 – PROMOTING STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT
- ▶ 3.3 – FETAL ALCOHOL AND DRUG EXPOSED STUDENTS
- ▶ 3.4 – SUPPORTING SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT
- ▶ 3.5 – EDUCATION ON THE DANGERS OF TOBACCO, ELECTRONIC NICOTINE DELIVERY SYSTEMS MARIJUANA USE, AND SECONDHAND SMOKE
- ▶ 3.6 – VIOLENCE (AND PORNOGRAPHY) IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT
- ▶ 3.7 – COOPERATION AMONG SERVICE PROVIDERS SERVING CHILDREN
- ▶ 3.8 – SUICIDE PREVENTION EDUCATION AND TREATMENT EFFORTS
- ▶ 3.9 – SAFE, CARING, CONNECTED SCHOOLS
- ▶ 3.10 – SUPPORT OF STATE FUNDING FOR STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES IN ALASKA
- ▶ 3.11 – HIV/AIDS AND OTHER SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STI) EDUCATION
- ▶ 3.12 – EDUCATION OF STUDENTS IN RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIORS RELATING TO HUMAN SEXUALITY
- ▶ 3.13 – IN SUPPORT OF ALASKA CHILDREN'S TRUST
- ▶ 3.15 – SUPPORTING THE ADOPTION OF TRAUMA-INFORMED AND CULTURALLY AFFIRMING PRACTICES
- ▶ 3.16 – REVISE PARENTAL PERMISSION REQUIREMENTS FOR QUESTIONNAIRES AND SURVEYS ADMINISTERED IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
- ▶ 3.17 – STUDENT WELLNESS
- ▶ 3.21 – EXPANSION OF HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE
- ▶ 3.23 – SUPPORT OF FULL STATE FUNDING FOR PUBLIC HEALTH REQUIREMENTS
- ▶ 3.24 – SUPPORTING SEX ABUSE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION EDUCATION
- ▶ 3.26 – SAFE AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS
- ▶ 3.29 – POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT