

House Public Testimony
HB 286 Operating Budget FY19
HB285 Mental Health Budget FY19

Compiled emails and letters
By 1pm March 3, 2018

xFrom: Carolyn & Mike Fox [REDACTED]@gci.net]
Sent: Saturday, March 03, 2018 8:19 AM
To: Rep. Paul Seaton <Rep.Paul.Seaton@akleg.gov>
Subject: constituent comment on budget

Rep. Seaton,,

Suggestions on how to save a little money.

#1-Make the Permanent Fund definition of "Resident" the definition used for all state business. Currently the state is giving away millions of dollars a year by using less restrictive definitions. Examples: Resident retirement benefits are being paid to retirees who don't actually live in the state anymore, and, many CFEC (limited entry) fishermen who don't live in the state pay "resident" fees.

#2-Stop providing general police services to communities that have a population base and economy sufficient to support their own police force. Example: Currently DPS provides general police services to the Mat-Su Borough. They have over 100,000 residents, a tax base, and economy, that is fully capable of providing their own law enforcement services.

Mike Fox.

xFrom: John Meyn [REDACTED]@gmail.com]
Sent: Friday, March 02, 2018 11:30 AM
To: House Finance <House.Finance@akleg.gov>
Subject: Public school funding

To whom it may concern, the funding for schools needs to at least consider covering the cost of living adjustments so that we do not have a flat funding from the last few years. Our students are worth more than that.

Consider the impact on our state for a future growth not of stagnation fund education!

Sincerely, John C Meyn
Anchorage

xFrom: jenn des [REDACTED]@hotmail.com]

Sent: Saturday, March 03, 2018 10:18 AM

To: House Finance <House.Finance@akleg.gov>; Sen. Peter Micciche <Sen.Peter.Micciche@akleg.gov>; Rep. Mike Chenault <Rep.Mike.Chenault@akleg.gov>; Rep. Harriet Drummond <Rep.Harriet.Drummond@akleg.gov>; Rep. Justin Parish <Rep.Justin.Parish@akleg.gov>; Rep. Ivy Spohnholz <Rep.Ivy.Spohnholz@akleg.gov>; Rep. Jennifer Johnston <Rep.Jennifer.Johnston@akleg.gov>; Rep. Chuck Kopp <Rep.Chuck.Kopp@akleg.gov>; Rep. David Talerico <Rep.David.Talerico@akleg.gov>

Subject: HB 286

I am writing you to express my dissatisfaction with HB 286's flat funding for education. This will be the 3rd straight year that the base student allocation will remain the same. Meanwhile, costs for everything from insurance to energy continue to go up. If this budget is enacted, many school districts across the state will have to cut teaching staff and important programs. Please consider the effects of flat funding for education on students, classrooms, and schools. More students per classroom, less opportunities for electives, less support for special needs students, less qualified teachers.

I can tell you from personal experience that this is having a negative impact on students. I have 2 children at Seward Elementary School in Seward, AK. I love everything about this school, especially the passionate and highly-qualified professionals that educate my children. However, due to flat funding, our school lost a teacher this year. That means more kids in each classroom. My daughter is in a 3rd-4th classroom with 29 children! One teacher, no aides. There's not even enough space in the classroom for furniture for all of them to sit on. Several times this year, new children have enrolled and I have watched this classroom absorb it until it's bursting at the seams. My other daughter has 25 children in her classroom, with 3 intensive needs students. Without aides to work with them one-on-one, this would create an extremely difficult classroom for everyone to learn in.

Flat funding for education is a disservice to the children who are depending on us. We must do better for them, so they can get the high quality educations they need to prepare them for their futures. After all, they are the ones who will be running this show in 20-30 years, so it behooves us to prepare them well.

Thank your your consideration,
Jennifer DesErmia

xFrom: Katherine Brown [REDACTED]@gmail.com]

Sent: Saturday, March 03, 2018 9:47 AM

To: House Finance <House.Finance@akleg.gov>

Subject: Early Childhood Funding

Greetings!

This email is in regards to the Parents as Teachers, Best Beginnings, Head Start, Pre-K, and all the other early childhood development programs. Thank you for the support given to these programs. I am a 1st time Mom with no family or other support in town & I was a part of the Parents as Teachers program. This program has helped me in so many ways. I looked forward to our visits as sometimes it was the only other person I saw for days. Please continue to support these programs as Juneau is in dire need of programs for our young children, and our new parents!

Thank You!!

Katherine Brown

Juneau, AK

xFrom: Karen Murphy [REDACTED]@gmail.com]

Sent: Saturday, March 03, 2018 8:20 AM

To: House Finance <House.Finance@akleg.gov>

Subject: Education funding

Our schools are in desperate condition due to insufficient funding. My husband is a teacher at a high school in Anchorage and I hear about this every day. If you really do care about kids in this state, if you want them to be safe and educated, then you will increase funding. Even in a recession, investing in our children makes good economic sense.

Sincerely,

Karen Murphy

[REDACTED]

Anchorage, AK 99507

xFrom: Julia Wigren [REDACTED]@gmail.com]

Sent: Saturday, March 03, 2018 9:14 AM

To: House Finance <House.Finance@akleg.gov>

Subject: Budget Testimony

My name is Julia Wigren, I was born in Alaska and raised here. I earned my MAT from UAA and have been working for the ASD for 10 years. I've been teaching at Dimond High School for all of those years. My husband, who was also born and raised in Alaska, earned a degree in wildlife biology from UAF and has worked in the state his entire career. We own a home in Anchorage and have a two and a half year old who we would like to attend public school. I give my family's background because we are real people who are committed to our state and community. We have never wanted to live anywhere else and are actively involved in and care about what happens in our community.

I have seen first hand over the last ten years how poor management of funds by both our state and the ASD has affected the quality of our public schools. You cannot have a healthy economy or expect our city to be safe if you do not invest in and properly manage our public schools. Teachers in my building are starting to feel unsafe for the first time in decades of teaching. We have less staff and more students assigned to each teacher. Students do not feel connected because it is impossible for one adult to connect with 30 plus students no matter how much we want to or the community expects us to. If you don't connect with students they are not engaged. This unfortunately leads to students finding engagement elsewhere outside of school and typically not in positive ways. Students can see the lack of support our state and community give to our schools and unfortunately with the way funds have been managed I am not surprised why the community feels that way. It is our community's responsibility to hold the district in check for who is managing these funds and how money is being spent. However, that does not give our community and state the right to completely strip funds and make it impossible to run our schools so that we can have enough teachers and staff to fully educate the children who are showing up and want to learn.

I don't have the answers but I do expect our elected officials to know that education should be a top priority. I want our public school system to be strong and attract the best teachers so that my daughter and other children can be inspired to do great things with their lives and within our communities.

Thank you
Julia Wigren

xFrom: Rebecca Bezdecny [REDACTED]@gmail.com]
Sent: Saturday, March 03, 2018 8:59 AM
To: House Finance <House.Finance@akleg.gov>
Cc: Rep. Gary Knopp <Rep.Gary.Knopp@akleg.gov>; Sen. Peter Micciche <Sen.Peter.Micciche@akleg.gov>
Subject: Public Testimony Operating Budget

Hello,

I write this from Kenai where I missed the public in person testimony slot--because I have a job that requires me to work from 1pm to 3pm.

I am emailing to give my family's support to HB339 to increase the BSA to \$100.

We also support HB287/SB131 that promotes forward funding to school districts. We were a pink slipped teaching family last year and we just barely stayed in the state because it took so long for Juneau to pass a budget. My teacher husband received his Alaskan teaching job offer the same day as an out of state one. Last summer was horrible not knowing if we'd have to leave the state we were born and raised in. I wouldn't wish that experience on my worst enemy.

How do I expect we pay for these "luxuries?" Again, as I felt like I screamed from the rooftops last year: a state income tax is not a bad idea. If it means our children and future Alaskan children get a solid education without massive teacher turnover each year--we're comfortable with a state income tax.

Thank you for listening.
Rebecca Bezdecny
Kenai, Alaska

xFrom: Jessica Mills Clark [REDACTED]@kpunet.net]
Sent: Saturday, March 03, 2018 8:44 AM
To: House Finance <House.Finance@akleg.gov>
Subject: Thank You for Continued Support for Early Childhood

Dear Representative Ortiz and House Finance Committee,
There is extensive research that documents that the number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) a person has significantly increases that person's health problems (and his/her risk taking behavior) over the course of his/her life. This impacts not only our economy, but our communities, as well. "Alaskan adults who report four or more ACEs, compared to Alaskan adults who report zero ACEs, are 49% more likely to be unemployed, 274% more likely to be unable to work, and 92% more likely to earn less than \$20,000 annually" (2013 Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Analysis by Alaska Mental Health Board/Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Staff). If we reduced Alaska's ACE score by half, (which would reduce the occurrences of obesity, adult Medicaid recipients, smoking, binge drinking, diabetes, and arthritis), Alaska would save \$90 million annually.

Here's how it works: Adversity in early childhood years can permanently impair learning, behavior, and health. There is a physiologic response to stress in children that, without the buffering response of a strong adult relationship, can cause prolonged secretion of stress hormones that allow ACEs to have such a significant impact. (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University). The effects of ACEs can be reversed by investing in prevention programs that result in improved family functioning (because it can reverse the epigenetic changes in young children, reverse the brain changes seen in adulthood, improve health outcomes, decrease mental health issues, and decrease costs overall) (Doyle et al, 2009 Investing in Early Human Development, Economics and Human Biology). The top three ways to reduce the impact of these experiences on young children is to 1) Support programs that train caregivers to care for their children (Strengthening Families, WISH), 2) Support affordable, high-quality child care for all families so that parents may work without compromising their child's development (AEYC/thread), and 3) Support a living wage and ongoing training for teachers, early interventionists, Head Start staff, and child care workers (Alaska's Infrastructure: Improving the Health of Families with Young Children, 2017 Alaska Pediatric Partnership).

With the support of a consistent, responsive adult in her life, a child's overall development can overcome tremendous adversity and find a positive trajectory.
Thank you for your continued support and investment in early childhood programs.

Sincerely,
Jessica Mills Clark
[REDACTED]
Ketchikan, AK 99901
(907) 254-[REDACTED]

xFrom: Jan Conitz [REDACTED]@netscape.net]

Sent: Saturday, March 03, 2018 7:52 AM

To: House Finance <House.Finance@akleg.gov>

Subject: comments on 2019 state operating budget

Dear Finance Committee Members,

Please accept the following comments into the public testimony record during your deliberations on the State 2019 Operating Budget. I submit these comments as a private citizen. My full name and address are provided at the end of this email.

The Legislature needs to act now to end the budget stalemate that has existed for the past several years. We are a wealthy state, in all respects -- we have great natural and human resources and are very fortunate. It is our responsibility as citizens and leaders to provide adequately for public services which will harness this wealth for the benefit all residents, and provide for steady growth of our economy. State services are absolutely necessary for our state to continue to function as a democracy with a healthy and growing economy. The philosophy that the only solution to end budget problems is to cut state services is unfortunate and damaging. I urge you to reject this regressive and negative view of the world. With our wealth of human and natural resources, we have more than enough to fund our needs, including collecting a fair share of oil revenues, expecting visitors who enjoy all that Alaska has to offer to bear a small share of the cost of services, and allowing all who work and earn a living in the state to participate in funding the services and infrastructure which enable us all to keep working.

The most essential service the State of Alaska provides is education. Education funding must not be allowed to decline relative to the general economy; indeed, education should lead! Education must be comprehensive, from early childhood through college and public education must be equally available to all. Above everything else, education is what will keep our economy strong a vibrant and viable into the future. Our human capital is what will allow us to grow and prosper as a state and develop beyond an oil-dependent economy. Education should not be regarded as a net cost, but instead the wisest investment. Please fully fund public K-12 schools, early childhood education, and the University of Alaska system. Please ensure that all residents including those in the most remote parts of the state have fair and equal access to education. Please also ensure that the University of Alaska can continue to grow in stature as a respected research institution of particular relevance to the North, along with being a first-class educational institution where we can be proud to send our youth.

The State of Alaska obviously also has a major responsibility to provide for public safety, law enforcement, and disaster response. This includes not only obvious services such as policing, but policies and actions to deal proactively with the very real crises developing as a result of climate change and global warming.

The State of Alaska must also provide essential services which support all other facets of our economy. The more state services are cut, the more difficult it becomes for

businesses to operate and for citizens to maintain an adequate standard of living. Basic human services such as health care free up the majority of our population to be able to work more productively and contribute more fully. Adequacy of other state services such as information (e.g. GIS mapping), licensing, economic development work, etc. enhance opportunities for new business development and economic growth.

Please do not short-change our great State! Every one of us who is gainfully employed here, resident and non-resident alike, can, without hardship, provide a small share towards making this state more prosperous, educating our children, and increasing new opportunities in all fields of human endeavor.

Please strongly reject the extremist and damaging philosophy that no tax, however responsible, is justified. Most people are more than happy to contribute to make their world a better place to live! Do not deny your constituents the opportunity to fulfill their responsibilities and pay their fare share!

At the same time, those businesses and corporations who prosper the most from our wealth of natural resources should be expected to pay a proportional share to attain the great benefits they receive in being able to operate here. Do not let Alaska slip backwards into the economy of a 19th century resource-extraction colony. Instead, let us move forward confidently in the 21st century to control our natural resources for the benefit of all who live and work in Alaska.

Thank you all for your dedicated service to the State. Please remember what is best for all your constituents and act wisely with respect to our budget and our future.

Sincerely,

Jan Conitz

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Jan Conitz.

Fairbanks Alaska

xFrom: Terri [REDACTED]@gmail.com]
Sent: Saturday, March 03, 2018 12:43 PM
To: House Finance <House.Finance@akleg.gov>
Subject: Support for Early Childhood Education

My name is Terri Mach, a 49-year resident of Alaska currently residing in Homer. I am writing to thank you for supporting programs focused on education of young children and their families.

My mother worked with young families experiencing poverty in 1965, the founding year of Head Start. I remember making home visits with my mother to places that challenged by emerging concept of a "house." My mother helped me understand that some families didn't have much money, but they loved their children and wanted the best for them.

Forty years later, I became interested in early childhood development. As I delved into the research, I realized that public awareness and policy lagged behind the science of early brain development. I reflected on the shacks and hungry children I had witnessed in my childhood and knew I had to make a difference. I left a higher paying job to work for a Head Start program and I returned to college to arm myself with knowledge of best practice in the field of early education.

Research tells us that what happens in the first 5 years of life is crucial for healthy brain development and strongly correlates with later success in school and life. Research tells us that all families need support systems in times of need to ensure physical and emotional stability for their young children. Research tells us that support for families and young children builds resilience that strengthens our communities. Every young child in our State will eventually be an adult in one of our communities and we must ensure that every child, regardless of family wealth, has a healthy early start.

Some of my first preschool students are now college graduates and just yesterday I saw the face of one of my former Head Start students in our local paper, recognized for excellence in sports and academics at Homer High School. I have watched dozens of young parents gain knowledge and confidence as a result of their involvement with our local Head Start or Parents as Teachers programs. My decision to work in early education has never been about income for myself; my decision is about outcomes for children who will become the future fabric of my community.

As you make decisions about our State's finances, thank you for considering Head Start, Early Head Start, Parents as Teachers, Best Beginnings, Thread, and all of Alaska's young children.

Sincerely,
Terri Mach

xFrom: Laura Bonner [REDACTED]@acsalaska.net>
Subject: Written testimony for HB286
Date: March 3, 2018 at 12:59:31 PM AKST
To: housefinance@akleg.org
Cc: Laura Bonner <ljbonner@acsalaska.net>

House Finance Committee members,

Thank you for adding in the \$19 Million and for the UA system. A strong University system is critical for Alaska's future. It not only provides for education for those seeking degrees for future employment opportunities, but also provides for research and innovative actions.

It is also important to fund the justice system so that criminal cases can be prosecuted and fund public defenders so that everyone have access to a legal defense as required by the Constitution.

Please consider the long term in your decision making for all Alaskans.

Laura Bonner
Anchorage, AK 99516



March 3, 2018

House Finance Committee
Alaska State House of Representatives
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: Critical Underfunding of the Public Defender Agency

Dear Co-Chairs Foster and Seaton, and Members of the House Finance Committee:

We understand that Alaska is in a budget crisis. But we write to call your attention to a budding problem with critical underfunding of the Public Defender Agency. In its Subcommittee Report, the Department of Administration Budget Subcommittee noted that a concern about excessive caseloads at the Public Defender Agency could cause refusal or dismissal of cases given the agency's constitutional, ethical, and statutory obligations.

But just yesterday we heard the Public Defender say that if the caseload is as forecasted for the next fiscal year, and additional funding is not realized, his agency will be forced to refuse cases.¹

When public defender offices become critically underfunded, it can spark a constitutional crisis. Without resources to provide even the basic elements of effective assistance, public defenders are placed in the untenable position of either providing ineffective representation (which can lead to overturned convictions if the person successfully challenges), or running such a ballooning backlog that it cuts against accused persons' speedy trial rights.


Alaska's public defenders are already overworked, the agency reports that trial attorneys in FY17 were required to work between 75 and 90 hours per week, and with the projected increases with FY18, their caseload would become crippling.

Unlike prosecutors, who can turn down lower priority cases when caseloads increase, defense attorneys have constitutional obligations to provide effective representation before the state deprives a person of liberty. Failure to resolve structural budget deficits isn't a sufficient justification for the state to deprive Alaskans of their constitutional rights. As we have said when this body considered Senate Bill 54, Alaska is not going to cut its way a better justice system that makes us safer.

¹ Nat Herz, *Legal defenders for Alaska's poor say they may have to start refusing cases*, Anchorage Daily News, Mar. 2, 2018 available at www.adn.com/alaska-news/crime-courts/2018/03/01/legal-defenders-for-alaskas-poor-may-have-to-start-refusing-new-cases-says-head; Matt Buxton, *Alaska is on the edge of a constitutional crisis as underfunded public defenders could start declining cases*, Mar. 1, 2018, available at www.midnightsunak.com/2018/03/02/alaska-edge-constitutional-crisis-underfunded-public-defenders-start-declining-cases.

House Finance Committee
Critical Underfunding for Public Defender Agency
March 3, 2018
Page 2 of 2

Sincerely,


Tara A. Rich
Legal & Policy Director



Post Office Box 1229 / Sitka, Alaska 99835 907.747.3400 / FAX 907.747.3462

Co-Chairs Seaton and Foster
House Finance Committee
Juneau, AK 99801

March 1, 2018

Dear Co-Chairs Seaton and Foster,

The Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association (ALFA) supports the FY2019 ADFG operating budget as amended by the House Finance Committee. The relatively small amount of funding restored by the amendments will leverage significant fishing opportunity that translates into additional employment and tax revenue to the State.

The stock assessment and in-season management capacity supported by the amendments has historically been funded by the Department to achieve sustained yield goals and secure economic returns to the State. Loss of this funding has forced the Department to manage with extra caution, which curtails fishing opportunity, employment, and income. Given the importance of fishing to Alaska's economy in general and the central role commercial fishing plays in Alaska's remote coastal communities, these investments make both fiscal and socioeconomic sense.

The salmon and herring projects restored with the amendments have positive state-wide impacts; the sablefish stock assessment funding is critically important to Southeast and our membership. The sablefish fishery is the most valuable state-managed groundfish fishery in Southeast. Stocks are currently at relatively low levels but showing signs of recovery. Adequate stock assessment is essential to ensure maximum fishing opportunity is provided to the fleet while safeguarding stock rebuilding.

ADFG comprises a very small percentage of agency UGF at 1.4%. In comparison, seafood generates over \$5.2 billion in economic activity in Alaska and is the largest private sector employer. Restoring funding for the projects identified in the House Finance Committee amendments make sense.

The Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association is an alliance of over 100 commercial vessel owners and deckhands committed to sustainable fisheries and thriving coastal communities. Our members support science-based fisheries management through collaborative research, advocacy and innovation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Linda Behnken".

Linda Behnken,
Executive Director, ALFA



March 2, 2018

To: The Honorable Representative Neal Foster
House Finance Committee Co-Chair
State Capitol Room 410
Juneau, AK 99801

The Honorable Representative Paul Seaton
House Finance Committee Co-Chair
State Capitol Room 505
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Letter in support of amendments to operating budget for substance use treatment

Dear Representative Foster and Representative Seaton,

Recover Alaska is a multi-sector action group working to reduce excessive alcohol use and its harms across the state. Our vision is for Alaskans to live free from the consequences of alcohol misuse, so we are all empowered to achieve our full potential. We have partners in various fields across the state, some of whom are health care and/or substance abuse services providers and experts in that field, all of whom support this funding.

We defend the Governor's Request for \$18 million state funds to expand substance use disorder treatment throughout the state. There is a critical need to expand community substance use, mental, and behavioral health services in rural and urban Alaska. Services would include residential and outpatient treatment, intensive case management, medically-monitored outpatient (ambulatory) withdrawal management and Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), sobering centers, recovery and reentry supports, housing, and other assistance.

Recover Alaska is running a Resource Center project with Alaska 2-1-1, an information and referral call line. In its first year, over 3,400 people called seeking alcohol, substance use, or mental health related needs, and this is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of true statewide demand.

Substance use disorders are linked to higher rates of other social ills, such as crime, domestic violence, sexual assault, suicide, child abuse and neglect. Over a third of Alaskan households struggle with alcohol. The 2016 McDowell Report on the Economic Cost of Alcohol confirms that the negative impacts of alcohol alone cost the State \$1.84 billion, not even taking other substances such as opioids into account.

Sufficient treatment and access to support will greatly reduce these costs, and we know that dollars put into prevention programming pay off at even higher rates. We understand the current fiscal climate does not lend itself to additional budget requests, but we encourage foresight and acknowledgement that by paying for these programs and services up front you will not only reduce costs in the long run (such as ER visits and productivity losses), you will save lives.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding this letter. Thank you for your consideration and your service to our state.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Hall
Executive Director