

Michael Mason

From: Allie Shepherd <allie.shepherd@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 23, 2024 7:07 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: In opposition to HJR 28

Dear Committee Members,

I oppose the HJR 28 amendment and the diversion of public funds to private and religious schools. As a former North Carolina student and teacher, I saw firsthand the negative impact of voucher programs. They have been in place there for more than a decade now without delivering the promised improvements in student outcomes.

Vouchers fail to provide genuine school choice; instead, they perpetuate inequalities by favoring select students and draining resources from public schools. I urge the committee to seek a legislative solution that maintains the correspondence school program with clear constitutional safeguards.

Increasing the Base Student Allocation benefits all students whether they are enrolled in a neighborhood school, charter school, or correspondence school isn't that a better place to start?

Thank you for considering my concerns.

Sincerely,
Allison Shepherd

Michael Mason

From: Aleah Stein <aleahdeann@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 28, 2024 12:11 AM
To: House Education
Subject: Oppose HB 400 / Oppose SB 266

Dear committee members,

I urge you to oppose the bills, HB400 and SB 266.

I am part of the many Alaskan Families who have chosen correspondence homeschool for my children. I am appalled by these bills that threaten our educational rights and choices. The current correspondence programs are being torn apart by the recent judicial decision.

House Bill 400 and Senate Bill 266 both attack our parental rights and choice on directing our child's education. These bills propose changes that strip our choices, freedoms and rights for homeschooling our children, they also don't let the allocated funds to follow the child through to graduation as it should. Alaska has always been a state that values freedom and choice when it comes to education. We believe in providing an environment where every child can thrive - whether that's in a traditional classroom or through correspondence schooling. However, these proposed bills undermine this belief by threatening the very essence of school choice.

I urge lawmakers to Oppose HB 400 and SB 266.

Thank you
Aleah Stein

Michael Mason

From: Amanda Garland <amandagarland6529@yahoo.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 28, 2024 1:12 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Opposition to SB 266

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB266, which seeks to remove the option for parents to opt out of standardized testing for their children. As a parent deeply invested in my children's education, I find this proposed legislation unacceptable and concerning.

One of the most fundamental rights parents have is the ability to make decisions regarding their children's education, including whether they participate in standardized testing. By removing this option, SB266 undermines parental authority and choice in matters that directly impact their children's academic experience.

Furthermore, the language of the bill lacks clarity, particularly regarding the definition of "private educational institutions." This ambiguity raises concerns about how the bill would be implemented and its potential implications for families who choose to homeschool.

For example, I am uncertain whether purchasing educational materials for my children from local stores or online retailers like Amazon would be considered a violation under this bill. The lack of clarity on such crucial matters is deeply troubling and requires urgent clarification.

If SB266 is allowed to proceed in its current form, I would have no choice but to withdraw my children from our correspondence school and homeschool them independently. This decision would not be taken lightly, but I refuse to compromise on the principles of parental rights and educational freedom.

It is evident that SB266 represents a blatant attack on homeschoolers and alternative education methods, and I urge you to reconsider its implications carefully. I implore you to uphold parental rights and oppose any legislation that infringes upon them.

Thank you for considering my concerns.

Sincerely,
Amanda Garland

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

Michael Mason

From: Andrea Boeshart <akboeshart@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 15, 2024 10:06 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: In Support of Alaska's Correspondence Programs
Attachments: 42110608_10157422733149460_8960843488031670272_n.jpg; 42165814_10157426943254460_2080941917251567616_n.jpg; 41222128_10157394100044460_314948023375364096_n.jpg; 12657991_10154641116074460_9005052270306759179_o.jpg; 21199360_10156384630739460_2910952530726548002_o.jpg; 12189411_10154456083169460_8419186920287054156_o.jpg; 12487075_10154588797394460_6561855439690315921_o.jpg; 12194657_10154456083054460_7004069699729822715_o.jpg; 12194902_1015445608304460_6976905383926100825_o.jpg; 11930916_10154319918059460_5694736189214910725_o.jpg; 11908922_10154346949214460_1278720413829654606_o.jpg; 11201156_10154059245599460_1368253068619674230_o.jpg; 10668881_1015408522254460_1643351526494925383_o (1).jpg

Good Morning, Chair Tobin.

I am writing to express my complete support of Alaska's school correspondence programs. Judge Zeman's ruling Friday left me reeling. Contrary to the NEA-Alaska's self-congratulatory statement that "this is a big win for public education in Alaska", I can say without reservation the opposite is true. Our correspondence programs are *public school* programs that have supported families in giving their children an individualized, diversified education for years.

Our eldest daughter, 15, has been enrolled in Connections Homeschool, KPSD's correspondence program, since her kindergarten year. And while we will continue to homeschool her with or without monetary allotments, this funding has allowed her countless opportunities we would not have pursued otherwise, given their cost. And I believe the State of Alaska will benefit several times over from that investment in my daughter's education, as she is intending to enter the Alaskan workforce, post university.

She is a highly motivated, self-driven 15 year old that has been able to pursue her fascination with human psychology, completing her second 3-credit course in the subject at KPC this next month, bringing her degree-applicable, college credit count to 12. Given her age, she hasn't yet qualified for UAA's Jumpstart program, and this is not an endeavour our single-income household would have pursued without our Connection's allotment. She's in her second year of (expensive) online American Sign Language classes and hopes to follow with a third, a skill that could broaden the future mental health services available for the hard-of-hearing in our state. She's been able to cultivate a love of the arts, with weekly violin lessons funded by Connections. She hopes to add instruction in the piano this next year. She is a voracious reader, a passion seeded early on, with so many books purchased with our Connections allotment, enriching our studies in science, history, and, of course, literature.

I urge the legislature to find a "fix" for the situation at hand, so students will be able to continue thriving into the next school year. Alaska will only benefit from investing in its future, -our children.

Thank you,

Andrea Boeshart

Michael Mason

From: Ariana Anderson <islavet@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 17, 2024 4:00 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Protect correspondence program allotments

Dear Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to urge you to support educational freedom. Nearly 1/5 of Alaska students need you to work diligently to amend the constitution to explicitly allow homeschoilers to continue to receive educational allotments through correspondence programs. Our futures have been thrown into uncertainty because of the recent court ruling finding all allotments unconstitutional, rather than ruling against the specific instances that supposedly triggered the lawsuit. This is a critical issue affecting thousands of your constituents in their top priority, their children. This needs to be fixed by legislative action immediately.

I have been a homeschooler for 40 years, beginning in a time and state where I, as a young child, knew we had to hide to avoid illegal prosecution. As a military family, my husband and I chose Alaska as our home in part due to the support, both practical and financial, that we have received from IDEA over the past 11 years (minus a 3-year tour elsewhere.) The ability to outsource parts of my children's education has allowed me to work more as the only relief veterinarian in Southeast Alaska, including organizing the veterinary emergency call group in Juneau and taking half of the weekend emergencies for the entire city.

Classes funded by allotment have greatly enhanced my children's education. They have had many athletic and musical opportunities that we otherwise could not have afforded. For example, my daughters take online Spanish classes from a native speaker. My son has taken a public high school class, and currently takes three online classes, which we have chosen from different institutions because the classes and scheduling fit our family's needs. As my husband reaches retirement from his military career, if we lose the option of allotment for education through IDEA, it will change our calculation of where we want to call home. If I am unable to outsource classes for my children, I will have to work less so that I can devote more time to giving them a good education.

I know many other homeschooling parents who are able to continue their careers part time because they are able to outsource parts of their children's education, while still supervising it all. Eliminating the allotment would interfere with their contributions to our local economy, as well as their contributions to their family's income. It would also mean that many children do not receive the educational opportunities they previously had, including enrichment activities such as athletics and music. Without homeschoilers taking such classes, many local small businesses that provide these services will struggle to survive.

My family will not consider public school enrollment. Indeed, there is no way the Alaska school system could absorb an additional 24,000 students, so this is a ludicrous and blatantly greedy attempt to eliminate nearly 1/5 of Alaska students from receiving public educational funding. It is unconscionable to continue this path of eliminating support for homeschooling, which is consistently shown to result in better social and educational outcomes compared to public school.

Rather than eliminating correspondence program allotments, the statutes need to be clarified either to specifically prohibit allotment use toward full-time private school education, or better yet, change the constitution to allow parents to use allotment for the education they deem best (continuing to disallow religious materials).

Thank you for your attention to this critical situation.

Sincerely,
Ariana Anderson, DVM
Juneau, AK 99801

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“The cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run.”

- Henry David Thoreau

Michael Mason

From: Bethany Sliwa <bsliwa@hotmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 17, 2024 11:29 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Recent homeschool ruling

Hello,

I am writing to you as a homeschool parent upset with the new ruling from our judge regarding the homeschool allotment. We started homeschooling last year after our son attended a charter school in the Mat-Su School District. We chose to homeschool for many reasons, one reason being he was more advanced than his peers and he could only go ahead so far in the classroom. Homeschool has allowed me to find specific curriculum to challenge him in the areas he is strongest while spending extra time in areas that he needs more attention. It has afforded us the flexibility to build a better, well-rounded education for my son who spent much free time doing “busy work” in his classroom. Through a correspondence school at MSBSD we have been able to homeschool him, challenge him and give him opportunities that we couldn’t have fit in our normal school schedule and could not have afforded without the allotment.

Furthermore, as a former staff member of the MSBSD I see the huge implications that this ruling will have on our local community not to mention our State. Here in the Mat-Su many families have chosen to homeschool for a variety of reasons. If action is not done to stop this ruling, you are causing harm to our community. Some schools will become overrun with students returning to traditional schools. When I worked in the schools, I saw how overworked staff are and how crowded classrooms are. I saw the children who do not excel in traditional school setting and the struggles they have in the classroom. Taking away options and forcing them into a “one size fits all” education will not only create more problems for the students themselves but also their classmates and teachers as extra attention needs to be given to these students and families. The impact will be further compounded for our community by the effects to the small businesses that have thrived because families who normally couldn’t afford the extra services/curricular activities were able to afford these services. In the last few years cost have risen and families across this state are struggling. Parents who choose to homeschool their children because they know what is best for their child should not be further burdened with their allotment money being taken away. This ruling truly hurts the lower income families who without this allotment do not have the choice to continue to homeschool. We hear from our elected officials how you want to improve education because you care about our children. It’s a common talking point during elections. I am asking you to prove it: stand up for ALL children in the state, not just the children who attend a traditional school. Fight for the 22,000 children and future homeschool children to have access to the best choice for their education. I urge you to consider changing the Alaska constitution to ensure that parents and families do not have to choose between what is best for their child and what they can afford. Make it possible for families to have options. Improve our communities by supporting the school allotment. I know many families who currently choose to homeschool through correspondence schools and if the new ruling stands, they will be forced to make big decisions that will impact their quality of life. Many may continue to homeschool but they will do so independently. They will not sign their children up for district-run programs so the district can continue to collect funding from their children. Please make this decision based on the rights of parents, the best interest of children, and our communities rather than what is best for teacher unions.

Thank you for your time ,
Bethany Anderson
Wasilla
District 27

Michael Mason

From: Brian P. <pikespk1@hotmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 28, 2024 11:22 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: OPPOSE SB 266

Dear Senate Committee Members,

Please accept my strong opposition to SB266.

This is discriminatory and unfair to thousands of students and completely unwarranted.

Alaska needs to improve education quality for all students, rather than encumber groups of students that historically outperform the norms.

I would ask; exactly who will benefit from HB400?

Would it not be better to put forth a program to improve the quality of education for all of Alaska's students?

I ask you to stand for all Alaska students and oppose SB266.

Respectfully,

Brian Pike
1452 E. Hidden Ranch Loop
Palmer, Alaska 99645

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From: Kendal Pike <kendalpike@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 28, 2024 1:58:22 PM
To: senate.education@akleg.gov <senate.education@akleg.gov>; Michael Kruse <mike.t.kruse@gmail.com>
Subject: OPPOSE SB 266

Senate Committee Members,

I am a mother of 4 children, 2 of which use a correspondence program out of Palmer. I urge you to **OPPOSE SB266**. This bill is clearly a rushed example of hastily and poorly written legislation with either little to no understanding of the programs or an intentional bid to discriminate against one group of public school students.

This bill does not pass the EQUITY test. It clearly discriminates against one group of public school children in an effort to defund and drain the correspondence programs. On the outside it appears as if NEA wrote the legislation themselves to eliminate competition even among the public system. If a public school or district is allowed to use PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDING to purchase an item(s), then the correspondence programs should as well.

- **Gym equipment**
- **Field trip related costs**
- **Transportation related to field trips-bus rides, etc.**
- **Private educational institution materials and courses that are non-religious (Ex: BYU, UAA)**
- **Religious educational institution materials and courses that are non-religious (Ex: BYU)**
- **Private tutoring (Ex: Sylvan Learning center)**
- **Access to a gym or physical education pace**

Here is a breakdown of other areas of this bill that are poorly designed or intentionally discriminatory:

Testing: Parents have the right to withhold their child from any activity, class or program they deem to be inappropriate. This bill is an attack on parental rights that will not stop with standardized testing. Forcing correspondence students to test will falsely boost the district scores as well, misleading the public into thinking that the curriculum, policies and instruction given at brick and mortar school is faring better than it is. Rather than addressing the 70% failure rate at brick and mortar it appears the authors of this bill would attempt to conflate individualized plans with a huge variety of curriculum, instruction, and tutoring to bolster the standard school scores.

Materials: Who exactly am I supposed to purchase services and materials from? All curriculum is made by private educational institutions. If the government becomes a curriculum company at tax-payer expense that would be of grave concern for me and at this point is not the case. At the current status, there is **NO non-private curriculum company** to purchase materials from. So all public schools would be violating this provision. Clear discrimination against one set of children not consistent with the treatment of standard students.

Assorted Expenses: Public schools purchase all sorts of items; fees, memberships, transportation, field trips, furniture, equipment...and yet correspondence students can't? The buses that take children to see the recent show Alladin, paid for. The buses that take children to Seward to the Sea Life Center, paid for.

Physical Education: I teach my children to swim, I don't need an instructor to do that, so now pool access is not allowed under SB 266 for us. Under State law I am well qualified to teach my own children, except if it is swimming? Except if it's Jujitsu? Under this bill I would have to pay for an instructor of some kind to teach my children basic skills I am qualified to teach and just require the physical space (pool/gym) to do so. My children do a variety of sports activities throughout the week but they also do PE at home-I am the instructor for that. But there won't be any PE equipment purchases allowed? Last time I checked the school districts purchase thousands of dollars of PE equipment for public school students.

Furniture: My children need desks, but that purchase isn't allowed? Bookcase? White board? Laptop? A smartboard? Of course all districts purchase these items and give them to children. Every child in the Mat Su District has a Chromebook. Why doesn't every correspondence student get one as well?

Allotment Carryover: SB 266 **steals** the allotment from the student at the end of the year. Punishing parents who are saving for laptops for their child. Many of the districts provide chromebooks for standard students but make correspondence parents choose between curriculum and a computer using allotment. What possible reason is there to steal from one child to supplement other children or to supplement the general fund in which NEA can then try to negotiate higher salaries from, even though they are not teaching these children.

Interestingly, anyone who works in education knows the older the child the more expensive the education (generally speaking). The allotments usually fund only at one level, not increasing with age. School districts use funding that should be for elementary students to subsidize the high school students. SB 266 wouldn't accomodate for that. Already drastically underfunded students (viewed as less than one student in the BSA) would be seriously underfunded for their high school education. This funding grab is the exact problem with the school districts in general, funding doesn't stay with the child to address their needs, it's taken from some to subsidize the others. In the process of doing that kind of wealth redistribution most of that gets gobbled up by salaries and benefits. I wonder who that benefits? Not the children. If a large influx of funds gets absorbed into the general fund the union will go after it for salaries and benefits, further stripping essential funding from the children who need it for their direct education.

Anyone who actually works in education or home education knows that correspondence programs are "cash cows" for their districts. This is an attempt to further steal money from one student to pay for others, to reduce the overall programs and attempt to force students back into brick and mortar schools, to restrict home education flexibility and efficiency, and to blatantly discriminate against correspondence public-school students. It would appear those who wrote this have little understanding of the programs they are looking to regulate particularly the impacts on the most economically disadvantaged people in the programs.

I can't imagine that those who authored this bill desire to discriminate let alone so harshly and blatantly. I hope that by thinking critically through what this bill actually does and how the funds will be used/misused will change the direction in which this legislature is going.

Sincerely,
Kendal Kruse

Michael Mason

From: Cassandra Hoover <cassandra.hoover12@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2024 9:57 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: regarding homeschool allotment

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for taking time to read every email coming in regarding the homeschool allotment issue. I will do my best to keep my concerns short and to the point.

I'm a homeschooling mom of soon to be two girls. I have been homeschooling through Mat Su Central School for 7 years. I have a huge concern with this allotment talk. My daughter was in school for prek and kindergarten. She struggled in a classroom setting. She struggles with many things that keep her from being able to participate as a standard 11 year old. She has a joint related medical condition that we are investigating that keeps her busy in doctor offices, eye appointments and blood work as well as testing and a possible trip to Seattle Childrens. Its imperative for our family that the allotment system stay available for my daughter. The allotment facilitates her ability to work at her own pace and be involved in other activities that raise her spirits and gives her things to look forward to. My daughter is learning how to play piano via a private tutor that is able to adjust her lessons according to her needs. She has intermittent ankle pain that is manageable with a coach at her gymnastic building. I'm hopeful, with the state of Alaskas help, that my daughter will be able to continue her education and be able to give back to the community as an adult.

My family has created a life that may be able to recover the loss of the allotment but I know an uncountable number of families that financially could not provide this education to their children without the allotment. I'm extremely concerned with what this will do for high needs kids like mine that come from low-income households.

If the allotment is removed families will lose choice of education. Alaska is different from other states. We have rural communities with no schools available to students. These students rely on creative options for education. If we remove the allotment system many students would be forced into no education.

The allotment helps support private, secular small businesses. Many people would lose their jobs as a result.

Our schools are not equipped to handle the 22,000 students that may be forced back into the school buildings. We in the valley are already struggling to keep teachers and pay them adequately.

It costs significantly less to fund a child via home school than if they were to attend in person school.

We should really be focusing more on safe schools than trying to force homeschool students into those schools. This time that was spent on talking about the allotment should have been used to discuss ways to keep our children safe. Safe from mass shootings, bullying, fighting, drugs, and overall accepting environment. I'm sure you are aware of the constant threats to our schools.

Please carefully consider these things as meetings and talks continue on regarding this subject. The allotment gives kids, like mine, a chance.

Cassandra Hoover

Michael Mason

From: Cynthia Hilton <cynhilton@outlook.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2024 9:17 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Homeschool Allotment Impact

Good morning legislators,

The outcome of the recent decision to withdraw allotments for homeschool families will not have the intended effect the NEA desires, which is to drive our homeschooled children into local dysfunctional school systems.

Our son is 14 and has autism and ADHD and the public schools have failed him time and again. When we committed to homeschooling four years ago we realized he did not know how to learn as he was constantly harrassed by other students in the schools, left out of activities by staff, and removed from learning settings so often that he had huge gaps in his education. Over the past four years he has caught up to grade level with homeschooling and his self-esteem is very high now, in contrast to when he was in the public school.

Our Juneau schools are known for short staffing, large class sizes, disorganization, and bullying - my son's best friend is a public high school student who was knocked unconscious in a school hallway just last week, and sadly this is not an uncommon event.

We will not be switching from Raven to HomeBridge, even if that turns out to be our only choice for a homeschool organization. We will not be sending our longtime homeschoolers to public school. Instead we will enroll them in a private accredited school online, so our student dollars will not go to the local schools. If we could stop paying taxes towards the public schools in Juneau we would do that too, but as it is we will still be paying into a broken system that we do not use.

Let me be clear that we have never used our allotment for private school enrollment. We have taken approved classes through Raven here and there but their rules are very clear and the majority of homeschool families would never consider a misuse of the funds, be it for religious materials or lump sum to private enrollments.

Our family will survive and thrive in spite of this but my heart goes out to families who are not so fortunate. Homeschooled families are educated and passionate and have long memories and the outcomes of these types of decisions will also play out in the ballot box.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Hilton
Sent from my iPhone

Michael Mason

From: Erin Mckittrick <mckititre@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 28, 2024 1:25 PM
To: Sen. Löki Tobin
Subject: SB 266 provides many valuable guardrails, but discriminates against rural students

Dear Senator Tobin,

I am a low-income parent of two homeschooled teenagers in Seldovia. One has always been homeschooled, while the other has gone between physical and homeschool depending on her needs. I appreciate most of the clarifications and guardrails in SB266, including requiring state tests, and better definition of what's an allowable educational expense.

I am worried, however, that the bill as written disallows all online classes, since nearly all are provided through educational platforms that could be called private educational institutions. Online classes are absolutely critical for education in rural areas where often there are no local providers (including the local in-person public school) that can provide what a student needs.

Section f, pasted below, allows for tutoring by 'private individuals' in elective subjects, but only if they aren't part of an educational institution. This implies that if I were in Anchorage, I could find someone to teach my student graphic design or flute lessons and pay through the allotment, but in my rural community, I couldn't sign her up for the exact same instruction on the Outschool platform.

And the limitation to "fine arts, music, or PE" seems even more bizarre. Why would I be allowed to use the allotment to pay for ice-skating lessons (something that is actually available in-person in my community), but not for an online class in multivariable calculus? (something I've signed one kid up for online next year -- which no one in my community is qualified to teach). I can't imagine the intent is to allow students to learn pottery and violin but not chemistry, math, or economics.

I agree with shutting down the obvious abuse of the system where urban students used allotment money to attend in-person private schools. But the focus on that abuse has placed the focus on the choices and opportunities available to those urban families. Please take the time to consider the harm it would cause rural students (particularly high school aged students), if they are unable to take online classes in academic subjects.

Perhaps the bill could be amended to allow for the allotments to pay for online courses and tutoring in either an academic or elective subject, from a non-religious educational institution or private vendor: "if an equivalent course is not available in the student's zoned public school?"

Thank you for your consideration,

(f) A statewide correspondence study program or a parent or guardian of a

27 student enrolled in the program may use a student fund account to contract with a

28 private individual to provide tutoring in fine arts, music, or physical education if the

29 tutoring is part of the student's individual learning plan under AS 14.03.300.
A

30 certificated teacher who is employed by the correspondence study program and who is

31 qualified to teach the subject or grade level has the primary responsibility to plan,

01 instruct, and evaluate the student's learning of the subject. Tutoring paid for under this

02 subsection may not be provided by a private or religious educational institution.

--

Erin McKittrick

Meddling energy geek, writer, and analyst. My [Alaska Energy blog](#).

907-290-6994

PO Box 164, Seldovia AK 99663

Ground Truth Alaska (<https://groundtruthalaska.org/>)

Michael Mason

From: ethan.mann <ethan.mann@proton.me>
Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2024 2:30 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Correspondence Study Program Allotments Ruling

Members of the Board,

I am disappointed that I find it necessary to write you all, asking for you to take action regarding a recent Alaska Superior Court ruling that correspondence study program allotments were unconstitutional.

My name is Ethan Mann. I moved to the great state of Alaska in 2021 as part of my service in the U.S. Army. I currently serve on Fort Wainwright, and will be staying in Alaska after my contract is up. I believe the state offers unparalleled opportunities to its residents, especially in the area of education. I was raised homeschooled through high school graduation, and have seen great positive impact from many former homeschooled students within this state. As I will soon be getting married, Lord willing, my eventual fatherhood has forced me to stay aware on the state's education stances. Because of this, I was disheartened to find out about the recent ruling.

On April 12, 2024, Judge Adolf Zeman ruled that AS 14.03.300-.310 were unconstitutional. The case started regarding misuse of allotments to pay for private school tuition (a use I do not believe is authorized or reasonable), but ended with a complete wipe of all such allotments. The court ruled that such allotments were against Article VII, Section 1 because they provided funding to private education institutions. I disagree; the requirements listed in AS 14.03.301(b) place such programs and allotments under the jurisdiction of the school district.

While I do hope that the ruling is overturned, Judge Zeman stated the following at the end of the ruling:

“If the legislature believes these expenditures are necessary-then it is up to them to

craft constitutional legislation to serve that purpose — that is not this Court's role.”

I am asking that you as the legislature take action to secure the allotments program. Education is one of my top considerations when choosing for whom I will vote, and I intend to place extreme emphasis on the action taken by candidates in regards to this issue.

Sincerely,

Ethan Mann

Michael Mason

From: Jim and Heather Short <shortjh1975@msn.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 27, 2024 5:16 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: SB 266

To Whom It Should Concern:

As one of the 20% of Alaskan families involved in correspondence education for their offspring, I resent that our educational rights are being threatened. Due to the judiciary, legislative, and bureaucratic regulations our successful programs are on the brink of destruction. House Bill 400 and SB 266 are a direct attack on parental rights as we direct our children's education.

I believe in providing educational opportunities that are best for our Alaskan learners. Taking these monies away from correspondence schooling is taking away one of the greatest educational opportunities for many Alaskan students and their families.

As an Alaskan, I have long appreciated our freedom values concerning education. Please do not undermine the choice and freedom of home schooling. Please OPPOSE Senate Bill 266!

Heather Short
Retired ASD Classroom Teacher

Michael Mason

From: Jacquelyn Makinen <hslda.ak.amb.makinen@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 15, 2024 9:53 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Summary Judgment AS 14.03.300 & .310

The Summary Judgment of Judge Zeman has certainly caused a stir among the state. The issues with the statutes, however, were discussed as being unconstitutional far back when they were first proposed to the legislature. As for dealing a blow to "homeschooling," no blow has been made. Homeschooling, as per AS 14.30.010(b)(12), has been around since prior to these correspondence programs. I would contend that the "blow" to home education came when Galena City School District first began their statewide correspondence program, Interior Distance Education of Alaska. AS 14.03.300 & .310 did not create these programs, it merely moved their governance to statute and opened the doors for families to use them as "school choice voucher" programs. Correspondence students are not home school students. They are public school students.

The Alaska Constitution says that you must provide for a public education system. Nowhere does it say that the State of Alaska must fund all educational choices. Furthermore, statutes are pretty specific that public education is to be non-sectarian. If the State, as a single-payer educational provider, funds all choices of public schools, religious schools, home schools, and correspondence schools, would that not make all education choices public education? Would the Catholic Schools of Fairbanks, then, have to remove the sectarian doctrines from the curriculum, as well as remove teachers that teach or mention Catholic doctrine? That also is in statute – that funding of a public school will be removed should the curriculum or teachers be found to be sectarian.

Before you pass judgment upon me as someone that hates children or education, I ask that you think of the unborn grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Alaska. As it stands, the legislature cannot come to a consensus on a budget without a deficit. Alaska cannot spend what it does not have without borrowing from the future. When people tout "school choice," they really only mean that the State should fund their choices because choices are already available. This idea that no one can afford a choice on their own, so the State needs to step in for them, has created a generation of dependents. Both political parties are guilty of fostering dependency. Citizens are just as guilty of fostering dependency through the lack of self-governance, knowledge of how our civil government functions, the purpose of civil government, a citizen's duties to civil government, and just sheer greed and covetousness.

For what it is worth, all education is religious in nature. Using the correspondence statutes as a pseudo-voucher program is unconstitutional. These programs existed prior to the statutes, and they weren't pseudo-voucher programs.

Jacki

Jacquelyn Makinen
AK State Ambassador Volunteer
HSLDA Ambassadors
907.590.5094 Cell
hslda.ak.amb.makinen@gmail.com / hslda.org/volunteer



Making homeschooling possible

Michael Mason

From: Jennifer Stevens <alaskawhovian@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 27, 2024 6:30 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Oppose HB 400/ Oppose SB266

Dear committee members,

I urge you to oppose the hastily made bills, HB400 and SB 266. As a part of the 20% Alaskan families who have chosen correspondence education for our children, we are deeply concerned about our educational rights and choices being threatened. Our successful programs stand on the brink of destruction due to judiciary, legislative, and bureaucratic regulations. House Bill 400 and Senate Bill 266 pose a direct attack on parental rights and authority to direct their child's education. These bills propose significantly inequitable changes that aim to strip correspondence students of funding, only to redistribute their allotment to fully funded public school students. Alaska has always been a state that values freedom and choice when it comes to education. We believe in providing an environment where every child can thrive - whether that's in a traditional classroom or through correspondence schooling. However, these proposed bills undermine this belief by threatening the very essence of school choice. We urge lawmakers not just consider these facts but also remember that each statistic represents real children whose futures are at stake here. Oppose HB 400 and SB 266.

Michael Mason

From: Jessica Bertram <matsulearnandinspire@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2024 5:46 PM
Subject: *****SPAM***** Request for Reconsideration of Judge Zeman's Ruling on Homeschooling Allotment System

To Whom It May Concern,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to respectfully address the recent ruling by Judge Zeman concerning the allotment system for homeschoolers in Alaska.

As a professional dedicated to the education of young people, I do not personally homeschool, but I provide small group classes and tutoring for many homeschooled families in the Mat-Su Valley. My background includes a degree in Early Childhood Education, and I have held teaching credentials in both Michigan and Alaska. My experiences across various educational settings have deeply informed my perspective on the unique benefits of personalized education environments, such as those provided by homeschooling.

The decision to remove the allotment system poses a significant concern for both the rights of parents and the viability of small educational businesses like mine. The allotment system has been instrumental in enabling parents to choose homeschooling as a feasible option, thus supporting a diverse array of educational choices for Alaska's children.

While I understand that the current phrasing of the Alaska Constitution may present challenges to the continuation of these allotments, I strongly advocate for legislative action that could amend these constraints. Ensuring that parents can continue to receive support for homeschooling is crucial for upholding the educational rights of families and for sustaining small businesses that contribute to the richness of our educational landscape.

Thank you for considering this matter. I am hopeful for your support in making amendments that will continue to allow parents the freedom to choose the best educational paths for their children, thereby also supporting small businesses and the broader educational community in Alaska.

Warm regards,
Jessica Bertram
907.390.9606
Mat-Su Learn and Inspire, LLC

Jessica Bertram
Mat-Su Learn and Inspire, LLC
1625 West Edlund Road
Wasilla, Alaska 99654
Matsulearnandinspire.com

Michael Mason

From: Jessica Lyons <jessica.ishmael@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 27, 2024 4:15 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Senate Bill 266

Hello,

As a part of the 20% Alaskan families who have chosen correspondence education for our children, I am deeply concerned about our educational rights and choices being threatened. Our successful programs stand on the brink of destruction due to judiciary, legislative, and bureaucratic regulations. Senate Bill 266 poses a direct attack on parental rights and authority to direct our child's education. This bill proposes significantly inequitable changes that aim to strip correspondence students of funding, only to redistribute their allotment to fully funded public school students.

My second son is highly intelligent yet has dyslexia. ASD does not have programs in my opinion to keep him at grade level on a knowledge level yet work individually on reading and imaging words. Homeschooling has been a necessity in our house.

Alaska has always been a state that values freedom and choice when it comes to education. We believe in providing an environment where every child can thrive - whether that's in a traditional classroom or through correspondence schooling. However, this proposed bill undermines this belief by threatening the very essence of school choice.

I urge lawmakers not just consider these facts but also remember that each statistic represents real children whose futures are at stake here. Oppose SB 266. I need your help now more than ever before - sign this petition today and join us in standing up for educational freedom for all Alaskan families!

Jessica Lyons

Sent from my iPhone

James Short
Home School Parent
Anchorage, AK
28 April, 2024

To: Senate Education Committee

Re: SB 266

The history of homeschooling in the United States predates the founding of our nation. In Alaska, to support students in many remote regions, the territory formed its first correspondence school program 85 years ago (Coalition for Responsible Home Education, n.d.). The need for a robust and flexible correspondence school program in this state is reinforced by the fact that approximately three times more students homeschooled in the state of Alaska, when compared to the national average of 5% to 6% (Watson, 2023).

In addition to offering flexibility to parents and students, homeschooled students can be shown to have better outcomes than their public-school peers. When examining standardized test scores, homeschool students earned median test scores between the 70th and 80th percentile (Rudner, 1999). When compared to their public school peers, homeschool students have been shown to score 15 to 30 percentile points higher on standardized tests (Ray B. D., 2024). For some minorities, this advantage is even higher, with scores 23 to 42 percentile points higher (Ray B. , 2015). You will also find better outcomes for homeschool students with regard to ACT testing (Allen, 2015).

Comparing GPAs for homeschool students to public-school students can be challenging due to a lack of available data. However, we gain great insight from examining the college GPAs of these two groups. When compared to public school educated students, homeschool students are likely to have a measurably higher GPA as college freshmen (Cogan, 2010). This continued through their college careers, with homeschool students enjoying an average of more than a quarter point higher GPA than their public-school peers (Cogan, 2010). Homeschoolers are also frequently able to graduate high school having already received some college credit, highlighting their abilities to potential universities, and reducing the time and cost needed to complete a degree.

In addition to the statistical advantages illustrated above, homeschooling also provides greater opportunities to experience life, art, music, history, science, etc., than a brick-and-mortar school can hope to provide to students. Another benefit to homeschooling is the ability to tune the curriculum to the student. Gifted students, for example, are often not challenged academically, resulting in them failing to reach their full potential, or worse, acting out or withdrawing. This failing of brick-and-mortar schools disproportionately affects minority students (Benbow, 2012). In the case of two of our children (the third will be homeschooled for the first time this fall), both had the best learning outcomes in the homeschool environment, even when compared to private, gifted, and charter schools. Homeschool students have also been found to be better adjusted than their public-school peers (Ray B. D., 2024).

All the points that I have detailed so far highlight the advantages of homeschooling that are experienced by the student. There are also clear advantages to the brick-and-mortar schools that these students do not attend. Since homeschool students are not present in public schools, less infrastructure

is required, lowering the cost to the public for their education. The students do not need room on a bus, or room in a classroom, teachers, librarians, room in a cafeteria, etc. All of these infrastructure pieces represent budget dollars that can be spent elsewhere. Can you imagine the strain on infrastructure in ASD if the 1,000 plus Family Partnership Charter School students returned to the classroom in the fall?

Some of the changes to Alaska Statute, contained in SB 266, reach far beyond just the homeschooling community. AS 14.03.116(a), as amended, removes the language codifying the right of a parent to opt their child out of standardized testing (except in very limited circumstances). That, most importantly, flies in the face of parental rights. Further, we have known for many years that standardized tests give limited insight into the abilities that a student possesses (Tanner, 2023), and result in teachers “teaching to the test”, which negatively impacts learning in other subject areas (Do Standardized Tests Show an Accurate View of Students’ Abilities?, 2012). On just those grounds alone, I would remove my child from any program that required it. The vast majority of my peers will as well, providing the state with less insight into the progress of these students, not more.

AS 13.03.310(b), as amended by SB 266, is so poorly written that I am not sure that I can decipher what it says. It appears, to everyone that I have spoken to, to prevent parents from sourcing their own curricula and being reimbursed for the costs using the student fund account. Whether that is the intent or not, it should be rewritten to provide clarity. AS 13.03.310(c) will be rewritten to say that the district can require authorization prior to purchasing materials. My experience has been that this will delay the purchase of materials in an unacceptable way. Currently we are allowed to purchase materials out of pocket, and frequently must wait for weeks for reimbursement. While that is undesirable, we at least have the materials on hand to educate our children. With this change, we would be prevented from even acquiring the materials until they were approved.

Additionally, parts of the bill create a funding disparity between homeschool students, and public-school students, by preventing student fund account money from being used to pay for things that are funded for public school students. For example, removing reimbursement for entry fees for physical education unless an approved teacher, who is not related to the student, is instructing the student (Reference AS 14.03.310, as amended by SB 266). Ignoring the fact that this flies in the face of what homeschooling is – we teach our kids – this creates a disparity between public school kids whose PE is funded by the district, and homeschool kids, whose PE is not. This will also drive the cost of that PE activity up, with no benefit to the student. It will also prevent student allotment money from being used to purchase equipment to be used for PE. Public school students have district provided equipment, and this disparity opens the state up for a lawsuit related to this inequality.

I urge the senate to discard this bill in its entirety, and allow the state correspondence program to continue in its current form. The use of funds to pay for private or religious school, or religious based material, has always been prohibited. We do not need additional rules, we simply need the current rules to be enforced as written. The changes contained in SB 266 will negatively impact students, and I urge you in the strongest possible terms to reconsider.

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Michael Mason

From: Joan Franz <joanbfranz@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 22, 2024 3:05 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Support Separation of Church and State with regard to school funding allotments

Dear Senators,

I support an allotment to allow home school children the ability to take music lessons, sports and art classes as part of their school curriculum. I also strongly believe in our country and our state constitution's separation of church and state. No public funds should EVER be used to attend private or religious schools or their classes. What has been happening with public funds is illegal and unconstitutional. What has been happening has stolen monies from public school children and further damaged our public school's ability to educate our children. I also feel strongly that a pension program needs to be reestablished for school teachers. School teachers are essential workers and we need to honor their work with pensions. I think each of us can remember those teachers who made a huge difference in our lives and our children's lives. We can attract and keep the best teachers, offering them what state workers and legislators presently receive-a pension program. I also support the minimum of BSA student allotment of \$680 that is presently in the budget. I strongly oppose the Governor appointment of a state school board to review and finalize acceptance of new charter school programs. The individual school districts are listening to parents and voting for school board members to make those decision regarding charter schools and it needs to continue to be a local district review and decision. There is a disconnect when I hear from Senator Shelley Hughes that our state just can't afford to fund a school teacher pension program and legislators just gave themselves a raise and do not also remove the pension program from their benefits.

The Governor and the AG with full understanding disregarded our Alaska Constitution to allow these voucher programs to be granting state monies to private schools and religious schools. I hope they cannot use the state department of law to defend their illegal actions and that there will be legal consequences for both of them for their actions. At this point I truly believe that AG Taylor needs to be removed from office for this and many other actions he has engaged in that do not represent the best interest of our state and were not legal.

I suggest that churches develop a lending program for those families in their parish who want to give their children a private religious school experience, but cannot afford this kind of school.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and hopefully supporting what is best for our most precious resource-our Alaskan children.

Best,

Joan Franz

Fairbanks, Alaska

Michael Mason

From: kara johnston <khopejohnston@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2024 9:21 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Correspondence program

Hello,

We were shocked to hear the decision by Judge Zeman on discontinuing our correspondence programs!

For many families the allotment and ILPs are essential to continuing to homeschool. Many families cannot afford to pay for workbooks, math classes, music lessons, swim lessons, or art lessons. They need the allotment to allow their children these materials and classes. Without these, the education and wellbeing of Alaska's children will suffer greatly.

Also, many of the local homeschool families' allotment goes to support local business such as Beemuns, JoAnn fabrics, Explorations LLC, and Encore Dance Studio. How will these local businesses stay a float without the homeschoolers? How will our dance instructors and music teachers be able to pay their bills? With this ruling, our local economy will suffer as well.

We also need to consider our IDEA and Connections staff members. Without the allotment many of our homeschool families will decide to go independent. This will affect our contact teachers and the staff members. Many teachers may have to be laid off and will be without jobs. This will be devastating to our community.

As a homeschool mom, I am already planning for next school year. I need to order curriculum now to ensure it will be here come August. My daughters need to secure their spots for spring classes. My daughter was going to sign up for college classes today, but now we aren't sure if she will be getting the funds she needs for next school year. She cannot sign up without knowing if she will have the money or not to pay for the classes.

This decision is crucial for the wellbeing, educational opportunities, local economy and livelihood of many, many Alaskans. If our correspondence program is taken away the educational future of our children will be in jeopardy.

Thanks,
Kara
Sent from my iPhone

Michael Mason

From: Karyn Grove-Bruce <kgrovebruce@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 27, 2024 3:02 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Senate Bill No. 266

Hello:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill No. 266. I am a private music teacher in Anchorage (Suzuki violin and viola) and I have several students that are homeschooled and would fall under this proposed bill. In reading the bill, I am very pleased to see that the parameters you are putting on the use of funds will eliminate the abuses, but still support using them to increase their work in music, the fine arts and PE. So often these areas are not recognized as being as important to the full development of the child as a well-rounded adult, so thank you for making sure they are still accessible for home schooled students. As someone who grew up in the Anchorage School District system and later worked there as a school psychologist, I am pleased to see you work on eliminating the abuse of the system, but still keep it vibrant for those who use it correctly.

Thank you,

Karyn Grove-Bruce

Michael Mason

From: Kendal Pike <kendalpike@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 28, 2024 10:58 AM
To: Senate Education; mike.t.kruse@gmail.com
Subject: OPPOSE SB 266

Senate Committee Members,

I am a mother of 4 children, 2 of which use a correspondence program out of Palmer. I urge you to **OPPOSE SB266**. This bill is clearly a rushed example of hastily and poorly written legislation with either little to no understanding of the programs or an intentional bid to discriminate against one group of public school students.

This bill does not pass the EQUITY test. It clearly discriminates against one group of public school children in an effort to defund and drain the correspondence programs. On the outside it appears as if NEA wrote the legislation themselves to eliminate competition even among the public system. If a public school or district is allowed to use PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDING to purchase an item(s), then the correspondence programs should as well.

- **Gym equipment**
- **Field trip related costs**
- **Transportation related to field trips-bus rides, etc.**
- **Private educational institution materials and courses that are non-religious (Ex: BYU, UAA)**
- **Religious educational institution materials and courses that are non-religious (Ex: BYU)**
- **Private tutoring (Ex: Sylvan Learning center)**
- **Access to a gym or physical education pace**

Here is a breakdown of other areas of this bill that are poorly designed or intentionally discriminatory:

Testing: Parents have the right to withhold their child from any activity, class or program they deem to be inappropriate. This bill is an attack on parental rights that will not stop with standardized testing. Forcing correspondence students to test will falsely boost the district scores as well, misleading the public into thinking that the curriculum, policies and instruction given at brick and mortar school is faring better than it is. Rather than addressing the 70% failure rate at brick and mortar it appears the authors of this bill would attempt to conflate individualized plans with a huge variety of curriculum, instruction, and tutoring to bolster the standard school scores.

Materials: Who exactly am I supposed to purchase services and materials from? All curriculum is made by private educational institutions. If the government becomes a curriculum company at tax-payer expense that would be of grave concern for me and at this point is not the case. At the current status, there is **NO non-private curriculum company** to purchase materials from. So all public schools would be violating this provision. Clear discrimination against one set of children not consistent with the treatment of standard students.

Assorted Expenses: Public schools purchase all sorts of items; fees, memberships, transportation, field trips, furniture, equipment...and yet correspondence students can't? The buses that take children to see the recent show Alladin, paid for. The buses that take children to Seward to the Sea Life Center, paid for.

Physical Education: I teach my children to swim, I don't need an instructor to do that, so now pool access is not allowed under SB 266 for us. Under State law I am well qualified to teach my own children, except if it is swimming? Except if it's Jujitsu? Under this bill I would have to pay for an instructor of some kind to teach my children basic skills I am qualified to teach and just require the physical space (pool/gym) to do so. My children do a variety of sports activities throughout the week but they also do PE at home-I am the instructor for that. But there won't be any PE equipment purchases allowed? Last time I checked the school districts purchase thousands of dollars of PE equipment for public school students.

Furniture: My children need desks, but that purchase isn't allowed? Bookcase? White board? Laptop? A smartboard? Of course all districts purchase these items and give them to children. Every child in the Mat Su District has a Chromebook. Why doesn't every correspondence student get one as well?

Allotment Carryover: SB 266 **steals** the allotment from the student at the end of the year. Punishing parents who are saving for laptops for their child. Many of the districts provide chromebooks for standard students but make correspondence parents choose between curriculum and a computer using allotment. What possible reason is there to steal from one child to supplement other children or to supplement the general fund in which NEA can then try to negotiate higher salaries from, even though they are not teaching these children.

Interestingly, anyone who works in education knows the older the child the more expensive the education (generally speaking). The allotments usually fund only at one level, not increasing with age. School districts use funding that should be for elementary students to subsidize the high school students. SB 266 wouldn't accomodate for that. Already drastically underfunded students (viewed as less than one student in the BSA) would be seriously underfunded for their high school education. This funding grab is the exact problem with the school districts in general, funding doesn't stay with the child to address their needs, it's taken from some to subsidize the others. In the process of doing that kind of wealth redistribution most of that gets gobbled up by salaries and benefits. I wonder who that benefits? Not the children. If a large influx of funds gets absorbed into the general fund the union will go after it for salaries and benefits, further stripping essential funding from the children who need it for their direct education.

Anyone who actually works in education or home education knows that correspondence programs are "cash cows" for their districts. This is an attempt to further steal money from one student to pay for others, to reduce the overall programs and attempt to force students back into brick and mortar schools, to restrict home education flexibility and efficiency, and to blatantly discriminate against correspondence public-school students. It would appear those who wrote this have little understanding of the programs they are looking to regulate particularly the impacts on the most economically disadvantaged people in the programs.

I can't imagine that those who authored this bill desire to discriminate let alone so harshly and blatantly. I hope that by thinking critically through what this bill actually does and how the funds will be used/misused will change the direction in which this legislature is going.

Sincerely,

Michael Mason

From: Rudy & Kimberly Welch <rkwelch@ideafamilies.org>
Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2024 11:25 AM
To: House Education; Senate Education
Subject: The need of homeschooling in Alaska

To whom it may concern,

This concerns Alaska's future, so it should be everyone's concern and responsibility to educate our children and future generations.

I am a homeschooling mother of four exceptional children in the grade ranges of 3rd to 11th grade. Within these four exceptional children, I have two children who have been diagnosed with entirely different diagnoses of dyslexia and other learning challenges. My children have been blessed to take advantage of resources that the mortar brick schools cannot provide or diagnose. When the time came to have my children tested, the help of our charter school and allotments made this possible. Even the program that we participated in and my children have recently "graduated" from has stated that if my kids were placed in a mortar brick school, they would have been placed in resources that would not have been the right fit and would have caused my kids to miss opportunity, not be on the track of graduating. guitar that he's qualified to attend a national event to play and is If one of my kids hadn't been diagnosed, they would have slipped through the cracks and statistically become a high school dropout because they were able to hide the learning disability. I was encouraged and applauded for homeschooling my children just because of the type of learning disabilities that my two children have. We currently use our allotments to enrich each of my children's lives. I have one who has advanced so much in a guitar that he's qualified to attend a national event to play and also able to be dually enrolled and earn college credit. My child's professors at the college have been so impressed that a homeschooler has been able to not only debate but keep up without a whim and put those who have participated in traditional, modern brick school in and out of state in awe that a homeschooler could be as educated as he is.

We currently only get a limited allotment that doesn't cover all our education needs, but we supplement intermittently and pay for the difference out of pocket. I even pay out of pocket for having my children participate in district sports. Knowing how underpaid and overworked the local teachers are now, and if the 22,000 students enroll in a mortar brick school, I'd anticipate strikes and more kids lost because the ratio of students to teachers would be huge. With or without the allotment, my children will remain in out-of-mortar brick schools. I have personally seen how it doesn't fit for every child, and each child is uniquely made.

It's a complete embarrassment that anyone would want to stipend the learning of 22,000 children all because of money. They are willing to risk my and other Alaskan children's futures.

To put it as tactfully as possible, this is complete bull and will cause issues not just for homeschoolers but also for the economy of ALASKA, and it will be even more of a downward spiral for Alaska's future. I hope the NEA is proud of themselves and, like myself, will be watching and taking note. It is an election year, after all.

Kindest regards,
Kimberly Welch

Michael Mason

From: Liisia Putnam <liisia08@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 22, 2024 10:06 PM
To: Senate Education; Senate Judiciary
Subject: AK Superior Court - Homeschooling Allotment Ruling 4/12/24

Hello Members of the Judiciary & Education Committee,

Thank you for the steps you are taking to ensure that children who depend on non-brick-and-mortar schooling are not disrupted in their education/learning plans by the recent Alaska court ruling that halts allotment funding for educational progression. As a parent of four children, I will independently educate my children before I EVER consider enrolling them in an ASD brick-and-mortar school. I will not allow ASD to fail my children as they have and continue to fail countless children in their educational, social, and emotional development. My children continue to excel academically as I work hard to be the support they need. The allotment that they have been granted access to is only a small portion of the money that follows each child through the financial institution of our education system. However, though they receive less money individually as distributed through their homeschooling correspondence program than would be allocated towards them if they were enrolled at a brick-and-mortar ASD school, I am able to utilize those funds in so much more of a direct and efficient manner that benefits my children academically to steer them towards success in their lives. Countless students are anxiously awaiting your help in securing the wonderful opportunities that have been made possible to them through the allotment that they have relied on for their well thought out ILPs.

Thank you for all and any time you are able to put forth towards this important matter,
Liisia Putnam

Michael Mason

From: Marie Terry <marieterryak@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 22, 2024 1:03 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Correspondence Schools - No to more regulation and less options

Good afternoon,

I know at the moment, it's mostly opinions and ideas being thrown around, but in regards to getting the program back on track, I have seen multiple people talking about adding more regulations and reporting to the way the correspondence schools are set up. That would push away those who are able to independently homeschool.

While most don't have an issue with the reporting and testing as it stands, if parents were forced to use standardized tests or do use more valuable time reporting to make someone in government feel better about how correspondence monies are being spent.

Limiting the curriculum choices to a set list also doesn't help these families. They homeschool FOR THE CHOICES for the majority. If we are dealing with a specific issue and have found a curriculum to help with that, why should someone else get to decide that we cannot use that? Would they begin to determine if something was the correct grade level? I have a kid who is working about 2 grades ahead in math and excelling. Would I be limited to just grade-level options because of that set list?

Setting limits in those regards would be a backwards move. While they have the regulations that we do need to show that we are accomplishing what we have set out to but in a non-overwhelming and intrusive manner has been working. Why would we change what has been working for the majority?

Thank you!

Michael Mason

From: MelissaJonathan G <gordaoff42@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2024 9:00 AM
To: House Education; Senate Education
Subject: Support Correspondence home education programs and families

To whom it concerns regarding Alaskan's future in education.

I am a homeschool parent of 4 years, before we homeschooled our kiddos I was very active in our public school setting. I was a recess monitor and a substitute to my kids. My son had difficulty following the curriculum available to him and was not able to read at his reading level in third grade. When covid happened we decided to make the choice to transition into homeschooling, my son within one year brought his reading to grade level through homeschooling with Idea. Public school environment made it very difficult for my son to learn because he was constantly being picked on and bullied. My son enjoyed wearing suspenders and a bow tie to school. It made him a constant target by a certain group of kids that just liked to pick on kids for standing out. He had rocks thrown at him at recess into his head and constantly called names. The teachers would single him out and not let him participate in activities because his reading was below level so he didn't get science or art, he had to go to a reading class that was so full that the teacher would ask me to sit in after my duties after recess, because she had no help. Cutting off choices for children to escape bullies and situations where they feel their learning environment is not conducive to them is just mean. There's no reason for it. It's actually going to cost the state more to take away homeschool programs. It's going to cost taxpayers more and our quality of education and mental health of our kids will be declining because of this ruling. Everyone remembers David Grunwald and what happened to the families in our community when bullies struck at school. Last weekend our Wasilla community was plagued with another tragedy and a family where a child didn't come home from an activity. Then the next day children faced shooter threats because of this at their school. Is this a conducive learning environment for our kiddos and why can't we have other options? Who is this really hurting?

Now let's talk about the word soup of the constitutional ruling provided by the judge... because that's what it is... word soup. We're talking about programs that have been funded for years by the state, including public school curriculum. The Constitution states that the state will not pay for private institution curriculum.... What kind of curriculum does public school provide? By a private institution it's a private institution curriculum, but we're going to specifically pick on a small 17% of Alaskans that want an alternative education choice.

Alaska has been the last frontier and a homeschool beacon because we have kiddos in all walks of life in rural areas that don't have access to schools or activities as big cities do. We're going to take that away because NEA wants more money?

Our homeschool program has gone through every single purchase and receipt from our allotment and made sure it followed our kids' learning plan, was not religious material and met the criteria of the state. Not only are we talking homeschool families affected by this, but this would literally obliterate the correspondent programs in Alaska and multiple small businesses that provide curriculum. Taking jobs and education from our community for no need just to fuel a system that is at the bottom of the barrel for the nation. As far as education is concerned, it is still the most costly.

Alaskan families and more importantly, the kiddos of Alaska deserve alternative options at best, if not a whole better system for education. When our money is going outside of Alaska to lobby for teachers unions, why are we not getting anywhere in education? Most homeschool correspondent programs pay

families about \$2,700 to purchase curriculum for their kids or programs. Public school, it's 54,000..... this is about greed, not education. If we can do it for less and better, what is the problem? Alaskan families work very hard to make sure their kids get to their activities, Have a good education, and live in a community where they feel safe. The Alaska legal system should not be counterproductive our efforts. There is no more active parent than a homeschool parent. They are literally dedicating their lives to ensure their child's education and future.

There are families that have been saving for certain programs, kiddos that have been working and dedicating their school lives to these programs that their funds will be cut. Taking children's savings and hard work right out from under them like pulling the rug.

This is the next generation even if you don't care or have children in the education system this has to hit your heart or your wallet because you're paying more for nothing. These are our future leaders, the ones that will be taking care of us in the near future... Do we want them educated?

Thank you for your time, please stand up for our kiddos.

Sincerely, just another Alaskan mom.

Melissa Gordaoff

9072023992

gordaoff42@gmail.com

Michael Mason

From: Patti Truesdell <pattitruesdell@icloud.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 24, 2024 10:03 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: HJR 28

Respectfully.. I would like to express my absolute opposition to this resolution. I am opposed to unnecessary changes in our State Constitution!

I support choice in education . I support home school programs... but this is not the way to support home school programs. Increasing the BSA will provide needed support for all our public schools... let's get serious about supporting ALL our PUBLIC schools.

I do not support HJR 28! What we need is real support for all our schools!

Thank you

Patricia Truesdell
(907) 394-4497

Sent from my iPhone

Michael Mason

From: Penny Goodstein <penny4books@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 24, 2024 1:02 PM
To: Senate Education; House Judiciary
Subject: I OPPOSE HUR 28

I OPPOSE HUR 28 "A RESOLUTION 1 Proposing amendments to the Constitution of the State of Alaska relating to using public 2 funds for education."

I OPPOSE using state funding for religious and other private schools. Our public school system is for everyone. There are ways to continue legitimate correspondence schools without changing our constitution.

Penny Gooststein

Michael Mason

From: Rebecca Bezdecny <rebecca.bezdecny@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 23, 2024 8:40 PM
To: Senate Education
Subject: HJR 28

I am writing to oppose HJR 28.

Public funds should never be used for private/religious schooling. Amending the state Constitution to allow this will create more strife and chaos in funding education as well as take more valuable time away from funding both brick and mortar and homeschool students.

There are quicker, easier, and less controversial fixes to this currently unconstitutional law.

Alaska did just fine with their correspondence program prior to 2014.

Thank you for your time.

Rebecca and Steven Bezdecny
Kenai, AK

Michael Mason

From: Switzer Team <theswitzerteam@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 18, 2024 8:21 AM
To: House Education; Senate Education
Subject: In support of correspondence schools and homeschooling programs for Alaska's children

Dear Representatives and Senators,

I'm writing in strong support of Alaska's many correspondence and homeschooling support programs, and Alaskan families who choose to use these fantastic programs and allotment funds for the individualized and parent-led education of their children. As a mom of four kids ranging in age from 20 to 10, who have all benefited from correspondence programs and allotment funds at various times through their educational experiences, the guidance of a certified teacher and the funding to pursue excellent educational and enrichment options for our children has been fundamental to their success.

Every penny of the allotment funds each of my students have received since my oldest son enrolled in IDEA as a Kindergarten student in 2008 and each subsequent child was enrolled has gone toward curricula, enrichment, and educational opportunities that have greatly improved each of their learning experiences and growth. Not one penny has gone unaccounted for. Whether it was a book or other materials, private class, lesson, or direct instruction, every item or learning experience that was submitted for reimbursement was reviewed and approved, then disbursed under the guidelines set forward. Parents know that no religious materials of any kind are reimbursable, and we pay for those items out of pocket if desired.

The expense to educate a child in Alaska is daunting. The funding received through the oversight and support of a correspondence program is only a very small portion that serves those families and students. I know I don't speak only for myself when I share that I spent far more than any allotment funds could possibly cover on each of our children's educational needs. I can also speak for other families when I say that even without allotment funds, I would have made the same educational choices for our children. It would have been more difficult for our family without the support of funding and a contact teacher/program, but it would not have led to their enrollment in a public school.

NEA President Klaameyer's statement that "We're still reading through the entire ruling but it's fair to say that this is a big win for public education in Alaska," is just downright wrong. Public schools are failing our kids, bloated beyond belief in their spending, and the outcomes pale in comparison to those of homeschooled and correspondence schooled students. I hope that you, as a leader and a representative of Alaskans, including our most vulnerable and youngest Alaskans, will do everything you can to support families who have chosen an alternative educational path for their kids and desire the support of a certified teacher and correspondence program. These programs are GOOD for Alaska's future. Judge Zeman's ruling is shortsighted, and should it stand, will be an utter failure for nearly 24,000 of Alaska's young people.

Thank you for your time and attention,

Shanna Switzer
Anchorage
theswitzerteam@gmail.com

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Michael Mason

From: Sharon Carter <sharon_carter@me.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2024 9:40 PM
Subject: Homeschool Funding Bill

Hello!

I have two girls (ages 4 & 5) headed into school this upcoming year. I would like to have the ability to homeschool them myself so I can give them the best education I can. I have made many sacrifices to be able to do this (personally, professionally, and financially).

I should have the funding I pay in taxes for schools to be used how I see fit to educate my children. Removing the funding would be a financial burden in providing the best education possible. I want the freedom to choose what is best for my children.

My children have excelled at home, learning from me. I tailor their education for them and exactly where they are at. My five-year-old is already doing multiplication and fractions, along with reading. My 4-year-old already knows most of her letters and their sounds and is doing advanced counting and comparing numbers.

My children deserve the privilege of learning the best way for them. We choose to homeschool.

Please leave homeschooling funding the way it is. Kids are learning and excelling.

Sharon
907-252-4424

Michael Mason

From: Shavon Mersing <shavonmersing@me.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 28, 2024 11:52 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: Concerns Regarding SB266 and HB400

Dear Senators,

I appreciate the opportunity to submit my formal testimony about these education issues. I have two students attending Russian Jack—one in AKSD and the other in preschool. Additionally, I have a sixth-grade student enrolled in FPCS, a child graduating from Middle College this year, and a daughter who graduated from FPCS in 2022 after attending public school until her sophomore year. I mention all this to illustrate my extensive experience as a parent within the Anchorage School District for many years.

I am deeply concerned about the potential ramifications of both SB266 and HB400 on homeschooling families. Not only do these bills jeopardize crucial financial support for many families, but they also threaten to restrict the resources essential for providing comprehensive education to our students, potentially impacting public brick-and-mortar schools as well.

Allow me to outline three key concerns regarding these bills:

1. **Forced testing:** State-mandated testing serves little purpose beyond consuming valuable instructional time. It neither reflects students' true abilities nor contributes meaningfully to their academic progress. Instead of relying on standardized tests, which often fail to capture the nuances of learning, we should prioritize authentic assessment methods that accurately gauge students' mastery of essential skills. Maintaining the option to opt out of testing for homeschooled and Middle College students is paramount in ensuring educational autonomy.
2. **Ambiguous wording:** The vague terminology, such as "private education institution," raises questions about the inclusivity of various educational arrangements, including tutoring services and specialized instruction. Clarity is essential to prevent unintended consequences and ensure equitable access to educational opportunities. Specific language is needed to address concerns regarding dual enrollment without unduly restricting educational choices for families.
3. **Rollover restrictions:** Limiting the rollover of educational funds penalizes prudent financial management and stifles innovation in homeschooling. Responsible allocation of resources should be encouraged, as it allows families to tailor educational experiences to their children's evolving needs. Moreover, homeschooling families alleviate financial burdens on school districts and empower educators to prioritize instructional resources effectively.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the repercussions of these bills transcend the sphere of homeschooling families. They hold the potential to profoundly affect the wider educational framework, eroding the principles of choice and flexibility crucial for fostering educational excellence in both public brick-and-mortar schools and homeschooling environments. Furthermore, it's evident that our public education system does not consistently uphold the principle of refraining from utilizing public funds for private or religious institutions, as demonstrated by their contracts with entities such as Sylvan, BYU, and numerous other private or religious organizations.

I urge you to consider the far-reaching consequences of SB266 and HB400 and advocate for policies that promote educational equity, innovation, and parental autonomy. Our children deserve nothing less than the opportunity to thrive in an educational environment that nurtures their unique talents and aspirations.

I do, however, support HJR028.

Alaska's K12 education has languished in mediocrity for decades. It's a paradox: the more we spend, the less our kids achieve. We need more competition and opportunities to raise standards. Preventing homeschool children from accessing funding due to failures in public schools or financial mismanagement is unjust. Despite Alaska being in the top 10 for public funding per student, we're in the bottom 10 for teacher salaries. How can teachers be paid so poorly while administrators enjoy lavish perks like an \$8000 car allowance? I believe the issue lies not in the amount of funds but in the mismanagement of funds by the school districts. While I'm in favor of raising the BSA, I think an audit of the spending for school districts, particularly Anchorage, would go a long way in ensuring that students are the actual priority and in curbing support for both ineffective administrators and teachers alike.

Homeschool families contribute to funding. My son, an ASD student, brings in \$19,553, of which we receive \$4000. This leaves \$16K whether or not funds roll over to be put in ASD's hands, saving them from paying the full \$18,392.

Please think long and without an agenda. The NEA that brought this lawsuit and opposes HJR028 have an agenda and I do not feel that it is the children, it is their budget. I and those who support HJR028 have the families and future of Alaska in mind. We can change education here for the better, this is a pivotal moment and we need you to defend families and students from those who prioritize money over our children.

Thank you again for your time.

Best regards,

Shavon Mersing

Michael Mason

From: Staci Malaby <stacimalaby@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 27, 2024 4:51 PM
To: House Education; Senate Education
Subject: Oppose HB 400/SB 266

Dear committee members,

My name is Staci Malaby and I am an Alaskan resident in Juneau. I am the mother of two public correspondence students enrolled in the IDEA program. Our family has been enrolled for ten years. I urge you to oppose the hastily made bills, HB400 and SB 266.

As a part of the 20% Alaskan families who have chosen correspondence education for our children, we are deeply concerned about our educational rights and choices being threatened. Our successful programs stand on the brink of destruction due to judiciary, legislative, and bureaucratic regulations. House Bill 400 and Senate Bill 266 pose a direct attack on parental rights and authority to direct their child's education. These bills propose significantly inequitable changes that aim to strip correspondence students of funding, only to redistribute their allotment to fully funded public school students.

Alaska has always been a state that values freedom and choice when it comes to education. We believe in providing an environment where every child can thrive - whether that's in a traditional classroom or through correspondence schooling. However, these proposed bills undermine this belief by threatening the very essence of school choice.

We urge lawmakers not just consider these facts but also remember that each statistic represents real children whose futures are at stake here. Oppose HB 400.

I will not consider educating my children in our neighborhood schools, and will not hesitate to remove my children from the public school system entirely in order to meet their educational needs.

Thank you for your time,

Staci Malaby

Michael Mason

From: Tiffany Mukaabya <tif.usmc@yahoo.com>
Sent: Sunday, April 28, 2024 11:12 AM
To: Senate Education
Cc: Sen. Shelley Hughes
Subject: HB 400 - corespondance schools

Greetings,

I have been following the very rushed bills in response to the recent ruling of the courts. I clearly do not think the language nor this bill should be passed as written. It was too rushed. Have you take time to talk or have an open forum with homeschool parents?

I am not only a public school education yes I belong to NEA, but I also choose to homeschool. Why?!? Well let me tell you when you get a text message from your child that they feel safer at home than at school you respond. Not all of my children are homeschooled one is still at Colony Middle. I urge you to strongly form a working group before making any rash decisions.

Kindly,

Tiffany Mukaabya

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

Michael Mason

From: Tirsa Myler <udderwise@icloud.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 27, 2024 9:35 AM
To: Senate Education
Subject: SB 266

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to object to portions of SB 266 regarding school correspondence programs. I have been homeschooling for 16 years, the last five of which were in Alaska. My family has benefitted from the correspondence school program greatly and we plan to continue homeschooling for another seven years. We are enrolled with IDEA, and have found the resources provided by the staff invaluable in educating our children. I feel that the current language of SB 266 would negatively impact my family in a number of ways.

My first objection is in Sec. 1 with the removal of parental authority to opt out of standards-based testing. This would impact all students in Alaska and is a violation of our rights as parents to do what is best for our child. Many students have test anxiety and required state testing would aggravate any emotional difficulties already present. The testing is all computer based, which many students are not adept at, especially in the early elementary years. We chose to try testing two years ago with our third grade child, and found that the format and length of the test was extremely stressful for her, so much so that she became tearful and said she “just pushed buttons until it was over.” While I understand the State’s desire to have data regarding student education, I do not believe annual or biannual testing should be required.

My second objections to Sec. 14.03.310 subsection d-1, the return of unexpended student funds annually. This implies a distrust of parental management of funds, as well as restricting budgeting. In our five years with IDEA, I have purposely underspent in some years because of an anticipated greater need in a subsequent year. Knowing that funds would be a “use it or lose it” situation would lead to unnecessary spending. I believe parents are the best managers of their child’s allotment funds, not the state.

Thirdly, also found in Sec. 14.03.310 subsections-7 the disallowance of physical education equipment from funding. This is just unfair. Public schools provide a multitude of P.E equipment for their students, why shouldn’t homeschool student have the same opportunities? As you can imagine, teaching physical education from home is challenging. Most of us don’t have a gym, basketball court, playing field, swimming pool, hockey rink, or tennis court. To not allow homeschool students to even purchase a basketball or ice skates is severely limiting their chances to receive an adequate physical education.

My last objection is to subsection f in Sec. 14.03.310 requiring a certified teacher to have the primary responsibility to “plan, instruct, and evaluate” learning from a private tutor. Included in this was instruction in art, music, and P.E. As I read it, that would require every correspondence school program to have an art teacher, a music teacher, and a PE teacher on staff, as many homeschoolers utilize tutoring in these subjects. My greater concern is that this places the burden of schooling on the correspondence program, not the parent. Homeschooling is all about parents planning, instructing, and

evaluating learning. If they happen to not be proficient in a particular subject, they should be free to choose whoever they want to provide that instruction without additional oversight from the school.

In closing, I wish to express my firm belief in the benefits of homeschooling and school choice in Alaska. I urge you to amend SB266 to address the concerns I have laid out in favor of continuing the wonderful opportunity for parents to educate their children freely.

Thank you,

Tirsa Myler