

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON
SENATE DISTRICT G

Sponsor Statement: Senate Bill 8 Education for Deaf and Hearing Impaired

Senate Bill 8 is a critical step forward in creating a more welcoming educational environment in Alaska for students who experience issues from being deaf or hard of hearing by enhancing safeguards, providing access to comprehensive information, and establishing tailored educational services. This robust bill empowers families to make informed decisions about their child's education.

SB 8 mandates that school districts provide parents with neutral, unbiased, and thorough information about hearing technologies, various communication methods and relevant programs that are tailored for the needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, as well as public and private entities with expertise in this area.

With this information from the school, parents are given the autonomy to select the communication method that best suits their child. Then the school districts are required to ensure that services are delivered by professionals with expertise in their chosen method. To enhance access to specialized resources, SB 8 directs the Department of Education to establish and operate a centralized program for deaf students, including residential services. School districts retain responsibility for special education and collaborate with the program to support students.

This bill is important for all of Alaska because children who are deaf or hard of hearing deserve the same opportunities for academic success as their peers. When we fail to provide these opportunities, we put these vulnerable citizens without secure means to provide for themselves. This bill also recognizes the diversity within the deaf and hard-of-hearing community and respects the preferences of families in shaping their child's educational journey.

SB 8 reflects our commitment to fostering a supportive and accessible learning environment for all students. Together, we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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Session: State Capitol • Juneau, AK 99801-1182 • (907) 465-4930
Interim: 1500 W. Benson Blvd. • Anchorage, AK 99503 • (907) 269-0174
Sen.Elvi.Gray-Jackson@akleg.gov