

From: [Michelle Weaver](#)
To: [Senate Finance Committee](#)
Subject: Please consider Alaska's children
Date: Sunday, March 29, 2015 12:40:17 PM

To whom it may concern,

I am both a parent and an educator, and I am dismayed that early childhood programs are at risk of losing funding in the upcoming fiscal year. I have a BA in Elementary Education and an M Ed in Early Childhood Education. Throughout my years of study, I have read various research that explains the importance of early intervention in helping children reach expected grade-level goals. The longer we wait before implementing interventions, the more costly and time consuming they are to achieve the same results.

This is why programs such as Parents as Teachers are vital to Alaska's success in the future. The PAT program provides parents with the support they need to help their children begin high-quality learning from birth. Without these supports, many families would not have the tools they need to prepare their children for school. These children would then be more likely to enter kindergarten lacking essential skills in pre-reading, with poor vocabularies, and beginning math awareness. Once in kindergarten, extra assistance would be needed to help ensure all children are where they are expected to be by the high standards of our nation's education system. If these deficits are not immediately identified in kindergarten, then interventions would be required later on, and as I have said, this gets more and more expensive.

The Dolly Parton Imagination library is also an important tool in preparing Alaska's children for school. A child's early exposure to books is a strong indicator for their later reading skills. Many families do not have the resources, financial or cognitive, to select high quality books for their child and have a home library. By having books sent directly to the home, all families can have a chance to expose their children to books, and begin developing a lifelong love of reading.

I currently have an 8 month old daughter. I expected my degrees in education would adequately prepare me for being a parent, but I am extremely grateful to have the support of Melinda, my Parents as Teachers Parent Educator. Having a newborn is hard, and I struggled initially with how to help my daughter learn from the beginning. I knew I should have been doing more, but I felt clueless as to what that would be, particularly through my parent-of-a-newborn sleep deprivation. At our first visit with Melinda, my daughter was just 3 weeks old. Melinda explained the Parents as Teachers program to me, and explained that much of our visits would take place on the floor, where we could play and interact as parent and child. This blew my mind. At that point, it simply had never occurred to me to play with my daughter on the floor- I knew tummy time was important, but somehow never thought about placing her on her back to play. I'm sure I would have figured it out eventually, but my daughter would likely have missed out on valuable opportunities for learning and motor development.

I have heard that there were comments in the House discussion of the budget wondering (sarcastically) if a child's education should start in the maternity ward. This is *exactly* when it starts! Parents are a child's first and most important teacher, but parents need support in order to do their best. Waiting until elementary school is too late- teachers are busy and parenting

styles are much more ingrained. If we want Alaska to have a future as a player on the national and world stage, we need to make sure our kids are prepared. High quality, early education is the best, most effective, and most economical way to achieve this goal.

Thank you for your time,

Michelle Weaver

463-3832