

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 212.

This legislation affirms a fundamental principle in Alaska's system of governance: that local governments should have the flexibility to make decisions in the best interest of their communities. HB 212 ensures that the investments our municipalities make—investments that originate from local revenues—can directly support a broader range of student services without being counted against the contribution they make as part of the State's constitutionally required system of public education.

Currently, the definition of "local contribution" could mistakenly be interpreted to include not only base funding for public education but also spending on critical wraparound services such as transportation, nutrition, early childhood education, after-school programs, and career and technical education. These services, though essential to student success, are distinct from the core obligation of the State to provide a basic education system. HB 212 appropriately separates these expenses, recognizing that they are often tailored to meet the specific needs of local students and are voluntarily funded by local governments and taxpayers.

HB 212 empowers local school boards to define key student services in a way that aligns with local priorities and conditions. It prevents penalizing communities that choose to invest more deeply in their students beyond the required formula. It makes a clear distinction between the State's obligation to fund education and the additional, supplemental role that local governments may choose to play.

While it remains the State's responsibility to meet adequacy and equity tests related to educational attainment across the state, adding this kind of flexibility for local governments similarly helps them meet the broader needs of the community, including and especially those related to equity.

This bill strengthens the partnership between the state and local governments, and local governments and school districts, in delivering more than education. It acknowledges the unique contributions of local governments while preserving the integrity of the State's commitment to a foundational education for all Alaskans.

I urge your support for HB 212 as a measure that respects local initiative, supports student success, and brings clarity and fairness to the funding of public education in Alaska.

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"Strengthening Alaska's Local Governments"

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