

Briefing on: ASLC Liquidity Issues and Proposed Plan of Action

- The Alaska Student Loan Corporation (ASLC), created by the legislature in 1988 to provide a source of financing for state-administered education loans, has successfully issued bonds from 1988 through 2007. ASLC's tax-exempt bond issues have been structured using education loans as collateral.
- In 2008, due to the extended disruption in the capital markets, ASLC was unable to issue bonds. One reason for that was contagion from the sub-prime mortgage-backed bond market had spread to student loan-backed bonds—particularly in regards to non-federally guaranteed education loans such as the Alaska Supplemental Education Loans (ASELs). Rating agencies, financial partners and investors have substantially altered their level of scrutiny and qualitative standards for asset-backed bonds, resulting in ASELs being viewed as sub-prime loans.
- In short, ASELs as they exist today are no longer of sufficient quality to be effectively used to back bonds. In order for ASLC to be able to efficiently use ASELs to back bonds in the future, the credit standards applied to borrowers of these loans must be strengthened.
- Failure to make the proposed changes will seriously compromise ASLC's ability to finance its programs and operations in the capital markets. In that event the options will be 1) the State of Alaska will have to directly fund the ASEL program at an annual cost of approximately \$50 million, or 2) ASLC will substantially cease originating ASELs effective in 2009.
- In addition to the proposal to raise the credit standard for the ASEL, because in the increases in the costs of financing the loan program, there is also a need to alter the interest rate on the Alaska Family Education Loan (FEL). That loan rate is currently set in statute at 5%. The proposal is to set the FEL rate at the same rate charged on the ASEL—currently that rate is 7.3% and is capped in statute at 8.25%. Proposal would allow the Corporation to set the rate on these loans using the same program-costs based formula used for the ASEL.
- The timing of a change in the ASEL credit standard is fortunate in that it coincides with the 2008 increase in the federal Stafford loan limits.¹ Stafford loans, also offered by ASLC for Alaska students, are a federal entitlement to any student attending an accredited institution and no credit standard is considered in making these loans (except that the borrower may not be in default on an existing federal education loan). Furthermore, in January 2009 congress introduced a stimulus bill which provides for an additional increase in the Stafford loan limits of \$2,000 per year for an undergraduate program.

The actions described above are proposed at the recommendation of ASLC Executive Officer and Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education Executive Director Diane Barrans. She is available to respond to questions or concerns and can be contacted at diane.barrans@alaska.gov or 465.2113.

¹ Annual Stafford borrowing limits are for dependent and independent students respectively: 1) \$5,500 and \$9,500 (freshman), 2) \$6,500 and \$10,500 (sophomore), 3) \$7,500 and \$12,500 (junior/senior), and 4) \$20,500 (all graduate).