

# SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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## **Sponsor Statement Senate Bill 235**

*"An Act relating to charter school approval and funding."*

Senate Bill 235 amends existing state statute to allow the Department of Education & Early Development to compete on behalf of Alaska charter schools for facility maintenance & start-up grant funds nationally available through the U.S. Department of Education. Alaska and its charter schools are currently ineligible.

Senate Bill 235 addresses this inequity in two ways:

First, Senate Bill 235 removes the statutory cap which limits the number of charter schools, on a statewide basis to sixty. As the only authorizer of charter schools, local school boards thoroughly examine and evaluate charter applications prior to agreeing to accept a charter for their district. In this way, local school boards act as a check on charter school over-proliferation and growth - today, there are only 26 charter schools in existence across Alaska – making a state mandated cap unnecessary.

Second, Senate Bill 235 creates in statute the programmatically required state funding mechanism necessary to comply under the federal grant program. It amends current law to establish in Alaska the per-pupil facilities aid program required under the U.S. Department of Education's applicant eligibility requirements. Senate Bill 235 then seeds the in-state aid program with a nominal \$1 dollar per pupil per year. However, it is communities and school districts which must arrange for themselves the means to provide the 10% local contribution necessary to achieve the initial 90% federal match and subsequent, escalating match proportions.

With minimal State involvement, but maximized local initiative & control, Senate Bill 235:

- Improves the State of Alaska's ability to secure the Federal Start Up Funds for Alaskan Charter Schools.
- Makes charter schools eligible to compete for federal grants for facilities.
- Is strongly supported statewide by school boards, school districts, and charter schools.
- Reduces a major barrier to the development of charter schools.
- Benefits Alaska's children.
- Will increase educational choices for parents & opportunities for students.

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