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**Sent:** Tuesday, January 21, 2014 3:46 PM

**To:** Sen. Gary Stevens

**Cc:** [rlsanders@sci.net](mailto:rlsanders@sci.net); Sen. Dennis Egan; Rep. Cathy Munoz; Rep. Beth Kerttula; [andimike@ak.net](mailto:andimike@ak.net); Keith Pahlke; Josephson, Ronald P; Hal Geiger; Bill Johnson; Mary Alice McKeen; Priscilla and Wilson Valentine; Jeffrey Kelly; Deb and Jeff Hartman; Joyce Talley

**Subject:** Testimony in favor of SB 111

Dear Senator Gary Stevens,

thanks for the opportunity to voice my support for SB 111.

My son Matthew Talley is recent graduate of Juneau Douglas High School.

I would specify his graduating year but that is a bit ambiguous, because while Matthew walked down the aisle with the class of 2011, he had not yet passed the exit exam, he was handed not a diploma but a certificate of completion, and he was thereby prevented from continuing his education at Landmark College where he had already been accepted for the fall 2011 semester.

Apologies for repeating myself, but, the HSGQE prevented my son from continuing his education at an accredited college where he had already been accepted! To add injury to insult, because my son was no longer a full-time student (due to the HSGQE), he was dropped from my health insurance and I had to pay out-of-pocket for oral surgery for his wisdom teeth, which cost me \$2,000!

Matthew worked with a private tutor throughout the summer of 2011 and took the HSGQE for the sixth time in the fall of 2011. We considered whether he could start at Landmark College in the spring of 2012, but didn't receive confirmation that he had passed his sixth try at the HSGQE until too late for the spring semester, so, Matthew started college at Landmark in the fall of 2012, a year later than our plans.

Matthew is thriving at Landmark College. He has been on the Deans List. He is learning and growing. It is very difficult to understand what public purpose was served by the HSGQE's holding him back for a year, and subjecting him to repeated humiliation and stress.

Of course as a parent it is that humiliation and stress that is much more important than the money and the time. Matthew failed the HSGQE five times. Because Matthew had an IEP he was given extra time, and once he stayed at school until 6PM working on the test. Five times the public education system told my son that he wasn't smart enough to earn a high school diploma. I am very appreciative of the teachers and counselors and others that encouraged Matthew to persevere, I am very appreciate of the parts of the educational system that did work for Matthew. But I am extremely upset about the HSGQE and how relentlessly it worked against everything that our educational system should be about.

Matthew is a charming young man and I am a proud parent. But, Matthew has multiple learning disabilities which make it very difficult for him to do well on standardized tests. Matthew is capable of learning, he has always made steady progress in school, and all of his teachers like him and appreciate his participation in class.

School is very difficult for students with learning disabilities. Matthew can and does learn, but, learning isn't easy, and it was extremely disheartening for Matthew that after four years of struggle he still didn't earn a high school diploma. Further, Matthew recognized that his best chance for an education was at Landmark College, an accredited college that specializes in educating students with learning disabilities. Matthew wanted to go to Landmark College more than you can imagine. It was very discouraging for him to learn that he couldn't start college in the fall of 2011, after he had been accepted, because of the HSGQE.

You can imagine how incredibly frustrated I have been when my son stays at school till 6pm doing something that is very hard for him to do, to fail through no fault of his own. I have to assume that the people who created the HSGQE, and those that oppose SB 111, must have some good reasons for their positions. But I find it hard to understand what public good can come from applying the cruel and unusual punishment of the HSGQE to innocent children.

I strongly encourage you to vote for SB 111. Please consider encouraging all your colleagues to pass this bill. Let's at least get rid of this unfortunate situation before it damages other families.

Thanks again for the opportunity to speak on this important issue.

Larry Talley