



ALASKA FEDERATION
OF NATIVES

April 10, 2013

Honorable Pete Kelly
Co-chair, Alaska Senate Finance Committee
State Capitol Room 516
Juneau AK, 99801

Honorable Kevin Meyer
Co-chair, Alaska Senate Finance Committee
State Capitol Room 518
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Co-Chair Kelly and Co-Chair Meyer:

On behalf of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) I am writing this letter to express AFN's opposition to HJR1 and SJR9. The AFN Legislative and Litigation Committee, a standing committee of the AFN Board of Directors met on April 5, 2013 and the committee passed the attached RESOLUTION 2013-03, entitled "OPPOSING AMENDING THE ALASKA STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW STATE FUNDING FOR RELIGIOUS AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS."

As you may know, AFN represents more than 120,000 Alaska Natives residing in Alaska, 12 regional tribal consortiums, 12 regional corporations and over 227 tribes and villages across the State of Alaska. AFN's mission is to enhance and promote the cultural, economic, and political voice of the entire Alaska Native community.

In addition to the reasons presented in the whereas portion of the resolution, private and faith-based schools are located in urban areas as well as areas with access to the road system giving those school districts the option for school choice. These options are not available to the parents and students in the Regional Education Attendance Areas unless they move to districts that currently have private or faith-based options.

Accordingly, AFN urges the Alaska State Legislature to oppose bills HJR1 and SJR9 and any future bills that would allow for the amendment of the Alaska State Constitution to provide funds for religious and private schools. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Julie Kitka
President

CC: Senator Fairclough, Senator Dunleavy, Senator Bishop, Senator Donny Olson, Senator Lyman Hoffman



**ALASKA FEDERATION
OF NATIVES**

ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES, INC.

AFN LEGISLATIVE/LITIGATION COMMITTEE

RESOLUTION 2013-03

**TITLE: OPPOSING AMENDING THE ALASKA STATE CONSTITUTION TO
ALLOW STATE FUNDING FOR RELIGIOUS AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS**

WHEREAS: The State of Alaska provides funding for public education through the base student allocation and for transportation, energy costs, and PERS/TRS allocations; and

WHEREAS: A majority of the 53 Alaska school districts have had to make significant cuts to their budgets in the past few years resulting in the loss of staff, increased class sizes, and programs supporting special education and English language learners; and

WHEREAS: Alaska Native students are consistently represented as students needing additional support to meet the academic core and to graduate and who are the most impacted by budget cuts to public education funding in rural districts and urban schools that continuously struggle to balance strained budgets; and

WHEREAS: HJR1 and SJR9 would amend Article VII of the Alaska Constitution to delete language specifying that no public funds can go to religious or private educational institutions and adds language that states funding is not prohibited "if the funds go toward the direct educational benefit of students," but provides no mechanism to address accountability measures; and

WHEREAS: Academic choices are already available in the public education system as Alaska students can enroll in publicly funded correspondence schools or charter schools and other alternative programs are available to many local school districts such as Native language and culture programs including the Mount Edgecumbe Boarding School; and

WHEREAS: The majority of the 53 Alaska school districts continue to face reduced state and federal funding and overall state and federal funds are projected to continue to decline; and

WHEREAS: Amending the Alaska State Constitution to allow for state funding to go to religious or private educational schools will result in further funding reductions to Alaska public schools; and

WHEREAS: Widespread opposition to the proposed amendment and HJR1 and SJR9 has been expressed by the educators and major education organizations across the state.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc. shall urge the Alaska State Legislature to oppose bills HJR1 and SJR9 that would allow for the amendment of the Alaska State Constitution to provide funds for religious and private schools.

ADOPTED THIS DAY 5TH OF

APRIL 2013



Julie E. Kitka
President