



February 9, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 82. My name is Robin Johnson and I am the Director of Technology for Nome Public Schools.

We are grateful the legislature recognizes the issue rural districts are experiencing in relation to cost and access to bandwidth. The passing of **HB 278. Sec. 14.03.127. Funding for Internet services** is commendable and does a lot to help districts fill the gaps that distance, geography and expense create for rural districts. I am writing to ask for your support of HB. 82 since some districts were deemed ineligible for this program because of contract cycles, and the upcoming State online testing requirement. Nome Public Schools is one of those districts and the change that Representative Foster proposes in the amendment to Section 14.03.127(a) on HB. 82 will "make us whole"

In 2013 Nome Public Schools was in the final year of a 3 year contract for internet services. At this time our district of 700+ students and 100 staff shared 3Mbps under this contract. This contract expired on June 30, 2013 and we went into contract negotiations for our new internet services. At this time DEED had made it clear that online state testing would become a reality during our next 3-year internet service contract. In order to be in compliance with this mandate we had to increase our bandwidth. As a result we entered into a new contract for internet services which went into place on July 1, 2013. This contract increased our bandwidth to 6Mbps. effective July 1, 2013. The other factor we had to take into account during these contract negotiations was the fact the the new GCI Terra system would be online in Nome in the fall of 2013. Moving from Satellite service to the Terra network meant a decrease in latency and wait time as well as the ability to access more bandwidth. We chose to move from 6Mbps to 11Mbps once the Terra system came online in November of 2013. This came at steep price which attributes to a reduction of staffing at Nome Elementary School. The cost of this increase meant that \$80,810.00 would now come from our general fund to pay for our internet services. Nome Public Schools annual expense for 11Mbps via the Terra System is \$381,552.00 or \$31,796.00 a month. We are eligible for 80% reimbursement through the E-Rate program which equals \$305,240.00 leaving us with 20% of the expense, or \$76,310. In addition we are required, by the Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA) to have filters in place for student online safety. These filters are not eligible for E-Rate funding nor are our email accounts. The cost of these two items adds \$4500.00 to our overall internet expense equalling \$80,810.00 a year from our general fund.

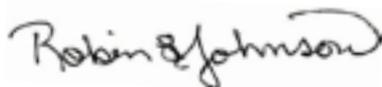
I ask that you please support HB 82, and not penalize the us because we happened to be in a renewal year in June of 2013. When you read the language in HB278, it does appear to cover districts such as Nome because we do meet the requirements as outlined. The problem is the date the law went into effect was just after we increased our service to 11Mbps. With the fiscal year driving district budgets and the E-rate process, I ask that you include the language that would make the bill inclusive of the entire fiscal year that the law went into place. The Date of June 30, 2013 would accomplish this goal as prior contracts expired on that date.

Alaska is a great state but some of the things that make it great also cause great problems. Due to the climate, vastness, terrain, and lack of roads, our district, and others like us, we are hundreds of miles from the source of internet connectivity. Satellite and microwave solutions are all we have. These

solutions are expensive to deploy and maintain. Our schools do not have the purchasing power to meet with the need. Broadband is great the equalizer and our rural students need and deserve the same access as their urban counterparts. However the expense is not equitable with our urban counterparts. HB 278 helps fill that gap and it will go further if it encompasses the entire fiscal year that it became law.

Please feel free to contact me if you need further clarification or information. I can be reached at rjohnson@nomeschools.com or 907-443-6203.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "R" and "J".

Robin Johnson
Director of Technology
Nome Public Schools
rjohnson@nomeschools.com
907-443-6203