



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of Health and Social Services

Senior and Disabilities Services
Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education
Patrick J. Reinhart, Executive Director

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Re: HB64: "An Act relating to the establishment of the Task Force on Reading Proficiency and Reading Instruction for All Students and on the Effects of Dyslexia on Some Students."

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the Council) is the Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) for Alaska as required under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Our role is to involve stakeholders to advise and assist the state on special education and related services. Members are former special education students, parents of students with disabilities; disability rights legal advocates, special education teachers and paraprofessionals, school administrators, staff from the Department of Education & Early Development (EED), and other state agencies. The day to day work of the SEAP is done by the Council's Education Committee.

The Education Committee met recently to discuss this bill, and while we support the proposed Bill, we have reservations about the membership of the task force. As Alaska's SEAP we are federally funded to assist the state in gaps in special education, and in this capacity we strongly advocate for meaningful input from a broad and knowledgeable group of vested stakeholders. This involvement needs to be from the very beginning, not tagged on later on, as is often the case with education initiatives. We were very pleased to see the addition of a parent on the task force in the new CS. While the Council was not approached prior to the drafting of the legislation, we hope, as Alaska's SEAP, that we will be able to offer our expertise as one of the non-profit members named in the CS. We have parent members of students with dyslexia and a self-advocate/parent who professionally diagnoses dyslexia. Our other concern is the glaring lack of teachers. While early detection and intervention for dyslexia and other learning disabilities that affect reading is crucial, it seems incredibly short sighted to only include a K-3 teacher. It seems remiss to have so many legislatures and administrators, but no teachers with experience in reading interventions after the important 3rd grade benchmark, or teachers who have experience with secondary students who are still struggling with reading. We do not want to put a "tiny patch" on this problem but use it as a real opportunity for improving reading skills in Alaska, and we see that including more of those with real grassroots knowledge from the beginning as the place to start.

Thank you and we look forward to assisting you in any way we can.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Kohler".

David Kohler
Education Committee Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Amy Simpson".

Amy Simpson
Council Chair

Creating Changes that Improves the Lives of People with Disabilities