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The Honorable Senator Mackinnon
State Capitol, Room 516
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Mackinnon

I have read your proposed bill relating to energy efficiency standards for educational facilities projects funded by the state of Alaska.

While I generally support measures that encourage this goal, there is a provision included that has nothing to do with energy efficiency and I believe would be huge mistake. The specific provision to which I am referring is amending Section 6 AS 14.1.1.017(a), by adding paragraph 6, which reads:

"For a construction or major maintenance project that receives a grant in an amount equal to 50 percent or more of the cost of the project, agree that the municipality or regional educational attendance area and any contractors, architects, or designers involved in designing and building the facility will not apply for an architectural or design award for the facility; in this paragraph, "architectural or design award" does not include an award for energy efficient or innovative design. "

This paragraph makes no sense – especially with regard to energy efficiency, the stated goal of the bill. I believe this provision was borne of an erroneous assumption that not only are architectural design awards superficial and serve no useful purpose, that they are actually bad for society and in some way negatively affect educational goals. I defy anyone to provide any proof whatsoever that this is true. I hope that this letter will show the exact opposite is true. They are not about glitter and show. They are about excellence.

There are many reasons for design awards. One of our projects received an award because of the security and safety features of the building. This was not just about the electronic security system, but also about the architectural plan and layout allowing easy visual supervision of students by staff and faculty. Isn't the safety of Alaska's children something that should be of primary concern? What is inherently wrong with projects receiving notoriety for having achieved something essential like this in an outstanding way?

Other projects of ours have received lighting design awards. Did you realize that well-designed lighting is one of the most important environmental factors that affect learning and cognition? Again, is there some reason that you think recognizing a project for its excellent lighting design is counter-productive to ensuring that our kids can see the chalkboard well when they're in school?

My suspicion is that this provision is an outgrowth of a misconception that a good architectural design costs more money. This argument simply has no merit. In fact, one of the design awards we received was given in part due to "effective and innovative use of existing resources." We got the award because we spent less money than the budget! It was a remodel project and we were able to re-use a lot more of the existing infrastructure than expected. Good architectural design has many benefits. And I would argue than an architectural project that ignores the budget is NOT GOOD DESIGN, nor deserving of ANY award. And likely wouldn't win any.

I believe our kids deserve to go to school in a building where someone cared about what kind of facility they were housed in. There is significant research that suggests that even the aesthetic considerations of a school building can affect educational outcomes. It says a lot to the kids about what the adults in their community think of them – about whether we value them. Letting them attend school in a piece of garbage tells them that we care about them about the same as we do our daily trash.

On the other hand, wouldn't it be much better if they could attend school in a building that is inspirational, one that tells them they are important, and that we want the BEST for them. Most architects I know want this to be the message that kids receive in every school that they design. And this is neither a bad thing nor an expensive thing. It simply takes an attitude of caring about the details of the building, about selecting quality materials that last a long time (low maintenance), and about proportion, color, and scale. These things don't cost money. They just take someone to pay attention to them. And I for one think there's nothing wrong with recognizing an architect by giving an award when this is done well. It doesn't cost the state a dime. They get it for free when architects care about what they are doing. And most of us do. We want our designs for school to enhance the learning process and inspire the kids to WANT to go to school. What on earth is wrong with that?! I've spent my entire adult working life as a practicing architect toward this end. It is NOT superficial, worthless, expensive, or wicked.

I think a more useful provision for your bill would be to encourage excellence in architectural design by adhering to the 6 principles espoused by the US Department of Education that are essential elements of a "school of excellence". These core principles are that the school design should:

- enhance teaching and learning to accommodate the needs of all learners
- serve as a center of community
- result from a planning and design process that involves all community interests
- provide for the health, safety and security of all students
- make effective use of available resources
- be flexible and adaptable

Each year, the Association for Learning Environments awards architects and educational facilities planners numerous awards that have achieved these principles and others in extraordinary ways. None of the principles are superfluous. Nor should they be ignored in favor of any other single design factor such as energy efficiency. They are all important (I especially like principle 5, which is about paying attention to the budget).

But I return to the original purpose of my letter. Neither my preceding paragraph, nor your proposed amendment has anything at all to do with energy efficiency. The most appropriate change to your bill would be to simply omit the proposed new paragraph 6. It does nothing to further your energy goals and sticks out like a sore thumb in the process.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David L. Moore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

David L. Moore, AIA ALEP