



March 9, 2021

Representative Fields:

Please accept this letter of support for HB128 as currently written.

My organization (Bethel Community Services Foundation) is, by statute, the entity that sponsors the Kuskokwim Ice Classic. In 2020, the Kusko Ice Classic had to swiftly pivot from in-person, youth group-based sales to a phone sales adaptation as a COVID-19 mitigation strategy. This resulted in extreme inefficiencies, a high risk for errors (volunteers writing down guesses as opposed to a customer writing down their guess) and a decrease in overall ticket sales, the profits of which are used to support nonprofit groups (primarily youth groups) in the community.

One year later, we are in the same situation as we prepare to open the 2021 Kusko Ice Classic. HB128 offers a solution for this issue- allowing people to participate via online sales, which will promote safety for staff, volunteers and the public by utilizing the kinds of technology we use in our daily lives. It also allows groups to continue to fundraise at a time when many of their venues have been closed as a result of the pandemic.

I appreciate your work on this bill and support it and hope that HFIN committee supports it as well.

In addition, I've copied over the testimony I recently gave to the House HSS committee meeting of HB76, which also offers some online gaming solutions. That testimony is relevant and is as follows:

*...The Kusko Ice Classic is a small and highly localized ice classic. People tend to be familiar with the Nenana Ice Classic; we operate a similar fundraising contest where customers guess the month, day and time of breakup- but our classic is visible primarily in our region.*

*We dedicate net revenues to nonprofit organizations that provide services in the community, most of which are youth groups. In pre-COVID times, this looked like youth groups selling tickets in stores to earn money for their club or group, much like you might see kids selling raffle tickets in any of your home communities.*

*Last year, at the time ticket sales were about to begin, we were just grasping the devastation of the pandemic. We realized we would not be able to safely sell these tickets in person. So We rapidly pivoted to phone sales strategy.*

*This resulted in a logistics nightmare for this fundraiser. Ice Classic staff and the volunteer groups tried to staff the phones, but the phones were easily and quickly overwhelmed at peak times. The process relied on a very slow routine of taking down a customer's name, contact information, guess, and details about which nonprofit group they wanted to support with their purchase.*

*The guess has to be 100% accurate and verified with the caller. With a volunteer at the receiving end of the information, the accurate recording of the guess was out of the customer's hands and into a*

*volunteer's hands.*

*But that's not where this transaction stopped. Volunteers worked remotely from their homes, with phones forwarded to different people every few hours. Folks working the phones wrote guesses as quickly as they could on forms. The forms then had to be transferred to actual Ice Classic guesses. All the guesses and the forms, now located at the homes of volunteers throughout town, then had to be retrieved and physically sorted in chronological order. And after all that, as a method of validating accuracy again, guesses were entered into a spreadsheet.*

*So again, a volunteer had to receive a call and complete a form.*

*Transfer the data to a ticket.*

*Sort the ticket into the entire pool of tickets in chronological order.*

*And enter the guesses into a data base.*

*This was four layers of work, about 6,000 times over.*

*We also saw a more-than 20% reduction in sales- we normally would have between 7500 and 10,000 guesses and with a phone-only approach, we logged about 6,000. Now it is 2021, and we are in a similar position. A vaccine is here; we have embraced many covid-19 safety precautions and adaptations, and we are moving into an era of decreasing numbers. But it is not yet safe or appropriate to return to in-person sales. We are staring down another potentially cumbersome process, and the language in this bill offers substantial relief.*

*The language offered in this bill reads:*

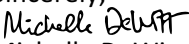
*Notwithstanding AS 05.15.640, a permittee, operator, or multiple-beneficiary permittee may sell tickets **online** for a raffle or lottery, dog mushers' contest, derby, or type of classic defined in AS 05.15.690.*

*This is not carte blanche. The statute goes on to offer the following guidance: A ticket seller may not sell a ticket online unless and until the seller verifies that, at the time of sale, the purchaser is (1) of legal purchasing age; (2) physically present in the state; and (3) not physically present within an option area where charitable gaming is prohibited.*

*I ask the committee to support this language, which will allow this fundraiser and, undoubtedly, many others around the state to continue in a safe way amidst the pandemic.*

*The true benefit of this adaptation will be reaped by the groups we serve, which most recently included a youth dance company, the group that offers swim passes and free swimming lessons for kids at our fitness center, the pet rescue group, the student council, and our local youth prevention group, Teens Acting Against Violence.*

*Groups like this have had nearly all their venues for raising funds disappear in this year of COVID. This adaptation will provide them with the ability to raise funds for their programs through the use of technology that we embrace in many other aspects of our work and lives.*

Sincerely,  
  
Michelle DeWitt  
Executive Director