

Good morning- My name is Alicia Berka, I live in North Pole and have lived in Alaska since 1984. I have worked in the early childhood field for 37 years. I encourage you to pass Senate Bill 8 and to include more equitable funding for early childhood. The years between birth and 5 years old represent the building of the very foundation of a child's brain – it determines their school readiness and future success in life. We have struggled for decades to educate and help legislators understand that learning does not begin at age 5! There is far too much evidence to cite it all here – science is vital and I ask that you pay attention to the early years in the growing phase of a child's life. If we want to turnaround the situation in our state to reverse the effect of child neglect, abuse, poorly prepared and poorly educated children, then we will need to adjust priorities and focus much more on the early years. The early years do not exist separately – they are part of the whole child. The argument I have heard for nearly 40 years – is that these years are the parents responsibility. Why? Do we not want our economy to flourish, do we not want our children to be successful, do we not want to illustrate we can and will do the hard work to ensure every child is cared for and educated? This bill provides an opportunity to turn around the inequities of DEED funding and provide more support for early childhood programs to support high quality early care and learning. I urge you to take a moment to consider how very critical the early years are to our success. Thank you, Alicia Berka