

SEWARD LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION OFFICE

Email: Seward.LIO@akleg.gov

Phone: 907-224-5066 / Fax: 907-224-5067

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

NAME: Robert Barnwell
REPRESENTING: Self
BILL # or SUBJECT: HB 220 Retirement Systems; Defined Benefit Option
COMMITTEE: House Labor & Commerce DATE: 1-19-22

NOTE: This testimony is considered part of the official record and will be posted online with the hearing documents

Please support HB 220.

I live in Seward and have seen a visible decline in drawing in quality teacher candidates and retaining teachers. This creates a serious decline in community stability.

Thank you

From: [Susan Brandt-Ferguson](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: Defined Benefits for Educators
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 1:29:25 PM

To Whom It May Concern,

As a product of Alaska public schools, the daughter of retired Alaska teachers and a 25-year veteran Alaskan teacher myself, I have a strong love for Alaska public schools. I chose my profession out of a love for teaching but had also witnessed first-hand that it could offer me a good, stable income; and that if I committed my life to it, financial stability through all my days. After attending college in Washington and teaching out-of-state for a couple years, I was thrilled to land a job in Sitka—something I thought would take much longer to accomplish, considering the large number of applicants the district received for every teaching position posted.

In my 25 years in the Sitka School District, I have served on several hiring committees for the music department. In the early 2000's, we had stacks of applications to wade through, with little to no outreach, promotion or recruitment. In recent years we have left positions open for extra time, scouring the landscape for potential and hoping for more highly qualified applicants. In addition, part of the reason I have been on so many hiring committees for music teachers in the Sitka School District is because after a couple of years, people move on—once the Alaskan adventure is over, there is little that holds them here. What has changed? Not Sitka's vibrant community, not the stunning landscape or quality of life in our town, not even the reputation of our school district—yet. The major change is the lack of a defined benefit option for our teachers. To add insult to injury, Alaska teachers are the only public teachers in the nation who have no defined benefit system *and* are not eligible for Social Security.

Our children deserve the world-class education that I received growing up in Sitka. However, without a defined benefit system it is a fluke when we attract the brightest and the best, and when we do, we can't keep them for long. HB 220 is a step in the right direction. How we treat our teachers directly affects the quality of education our children receive. The quality of Alaska's public schools directly affects our economy. Support Alaska's future by passing HB 220. Our teachers, our children and our state depend on it!

Sincerely,

Susan Brandt-Ferguson

[REDACTED]

Sitka, AK 99835

[REDACTED]

From: matthew witthoeft [REDACTED]

Subject: Constituent in support of HB 220

Date: January 19, 2022 at 10:14:33 AM AKST

To: Representative.Ivy.Sponholz@akleg.gov, representative.grier.hopkins@akleg.gov

Hi Ivy-

My name is Matt Witthoeft and i live and work in your district. Both myself and my wife Karen are teachers here in the Anchorage school district. Karen started in 2006 and myself in 2008. This means we are teir 3 employees for retirement with the State of Alaska. The first few years our retirement accounts made very little money with the 2008 recession. If was very disheartening to realize i joined a profession that lost the secure retirement that was offered up until 2006. We both are now likely to lose the social security that we paid into in our prior jobs that were not in education. I realize that is a separate issue to the retirement system, but it all compounds to the fact that educators in our state need a dignified retirement like the generations of educators before us. The state currently can't recruit or retain qualified teachers with the high cost of living and stagnant wages and the 48th best retirement for public employee's. This lack of recruitment and retention has become especially obvious during the pandemic.

I grew up in East Anchorage, was born in Providence Hospital. I graduated from Bartlett High, and have spent the majoriity of my life working and living in East Anchorage. I would like to stay in state, but plan to leave and use my administrative license to make a living somewhere with a secure retirement. I have already committed 12 years to this district and state, but the stress of worrying that my retirement isn't secure and vulnerable to the swings of the stock market. I have to say the social security issue is a double compound to this issue, it literally scares me to think i won't even be eligible for this safety net if something happened. Teachers and public employees hired after 2006 have a retirement system from the state that is unsustainable and undignified for the valuable work they do for our communities.

I appreciate your support of HB220, public employees, and public education.

Sincerely,

Matthew Witthoeft

From: Sarah Gotschall [REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 11:37:51 AM

To: Rep. Zack Fields <Rep.Zack.Fields@akleg.gov>; Representative.Ivy.sponholtz@akleg.gov
<Representative.Ivy.sponholtz@akleg.gov>; representative.calivn.schrage@akleg.gov
<representative.calivn.schrage@akleg.gov>; Rep. Liz Snyder <Rep.Liz.Snyder@akleg.gov>; Rep. David Nelson <Rep.David.Nelson@akleg.gov>; Rep. James Kaufman <Rep.James.Kaufman@akleg.gov>; representaive.ken.mccarty@akleg.gov <representaive.ken.mccarty@akleg.gov>

Subject: HB 220 PERS

Dear Mr. Fields,

I am a 20+ year educator in Alaska. I earned my Master of Arts in Education from APU in 2009 after working as a Sped TA for 10+ years.

It was THE WORST financial decision I have ever made in my entire life. I love teaching (obviously because I still am), however every year that passes I become acutely more aware of my precarious financial decision and I am deeply agrieved at the gross inequities in our tiered retirement system. I feel trapped at this point and I don't see how the state can expect to attract and retain long term teachers with the Tier III system. I fully understand the intent behind Tier I. How could our leaders have possibly put us in this situation and then FAIL to recitify it when it became clear that it didn't work? I've been to NUMEROUS public meetings over the years and it's absolutely heartbreaking to hear young teachers tearfully testify as to how they feel forced to leave the state in order to secure a decent predictable financial future for their families or leave the profession.

Please support HB 220 and encourage your colleagues to as well.

Respectfully,

Sarah Gotschall

From: [REDACTED]**Sent:** Friday, January 21, 2022 10:51 AM**To:** LIO Kenai <LIO.Kenai@akleg.gov>**Subject:** House Bill 220

The State of Alaska has done an injustice to our public employees for too many years! We have lost so many very intelligent, loyal, and competent employees over the last 15 years. Now with Covid, employees can't even get paid medical leave when they test positive for Covid unless they have their few personal leave days available. This is not to mention mental health support for employees and students due to Covid. What do we expect from employees that have tens of thousands of dollars invested in the education it takes to become a teacher and still expect them to spend more money for continuing education to keep their state teaching credentials. Many teachers have gone the extra mile to obtain their Master's Degrees so they can better educate our students.

I implore you to pass legislation to help keep our hard working public employees in Alaska! This is for our children and safety of the entire state. This is to make our state a better place to live, and we should be ashamed that this has gone on soooooo long!

Kent Rininger

[REDACTED]

Seward, Alaska 99664

From: **Amy Gallaway** [REDACTED]

Date: Mon, Nov 8, 2021 at 4:48 PM

Subject: In Support of HB220

To: <House.Labor.And.Commerce@akleg.gov>

Cc: <Representative.Adam.Wool@akleg.gov>

Dear Representative Fields, Representative Sponholz and Committee Members, Alaska has the worst-in-the-nation retirement system for teachers. When I tell my teacher friends across the nation that Alaskan teachers have no pension and no social security, the first thing they always say is "How do you keep teachers?" The answer is, We don't. Alaska is not competitive. Adding insult to injury, Alaska teachers are not enrolled in Social Security. I recently met with Rep. Young and Sen. Murkowski, and I used my precious time to implore them to help with the teacher shortage crisis and address the social security Windfall provision. But, there is not much they can do at the federal level. It is you, our state legislators who have the power to fix the teacher shortage crisis. You must act now.

My name is Amy Gallaway, and I am the 2020 Alaska Teacher of the Year, as well as a civics teacher in Fairbanks, Alaska. I am writing in strong support of HB 220 which fixes the broken retirement system for educators. Alaska is in a teacher "shortage" crisis, and there is no more time to wait to bring back one of the main incentives for attracting and keeping quality educators in Alaska- a defined benefit pension. As an Alaskan teacher of 23 years, I am intimately aware of the crisis facing Alaska concerning teacher retention and recruitment. Alaskan students are starting the school year with over 900 openings for educators across the state. For the first time in the 18 years I have been at West Valley High School, we started the year without an English teacher, a counselor, a secretary, and numerous aide positions. My husband's school started the year without a Kindergarten teacher and numerous other certified and classified positions. I have watched the last 10 years as exceptional student teachers leave the state after 6 and 7 years because other states provide job stability and pensions that Alaska does not. I have watched teacher friends leave the state and the profession for better working conditions and better benefits. As a member of the Commissioner's Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force, I can tell you unequivocally that a defined benefit pension is one of the top three most important factors for teacher retention and recruitment. A defined benefit system is one critical incentive to make Alaska competitive nationwide, for attracting and retaining quality teachers.

I love my job. Being a teacher is not what I do, it is who I am. That said, if I did not have a pension, I guarantee I would not still be teaching in Alaska. The combination of my salary with my defined benefit pension has kept me from taking other job offers or from quitting numerous times when the weight of teaching felt almost too much to bear. My experience is just one of thousands and is backed up by research and surveys completed just last year by the task force.

I understand the fiscal realities in Alaska; something that may cost money, especially for education, can be a big ask. But, the cost of not acting is far too great at this point. Our students are suffering from a lack of quality and consistent educators. We will not be able to improve education outcomes for all students if we cannot put quality teachers in the classroom with them. In my experience, a teacher starts to become most effective during their 4th-5th years as a teacher; just as many teachers leave our state because there are few incentives keeping them here. Finally, A 2017 analysis by The University of Alaska-Anchorage Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) determined that the cost of teacher turnover in Alaska to be \$20,000 and \$20 million annually. The state must act now to incentivize quality teacher retention and recruitment, and adding a pension back would do just that.

I work with students everyday; they inspire me with their potential and passion to make their lives and the lives of all Alaskans better. The teacher shortage crisis is adversely impacting our students at all levels and in all communities and puts Alaskan students at a competitive disadvantage nationally and globally. A defined benefit is just one way to incentivize getting quality teachers in front of every student in every classroom. Public education is the cornerstone of our state and our republic, and the foundation of our economy. Please support HB220 to protect the health of future of public education.

Amy Gallaway

Teacher, West Valley High School

U.S. Government & Civics / Innovation & Inquiry

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: Lisa Rininger [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, January 21, 2022 11:26 AM
To: LIO Kenai <LIO.Kenai@akleg.gov>
Subject: Pass HB 220

It is imperative that House Bill 220 is passed. We need to support our teachers with this important health bill. The support for teachers has declined over the years to the point that there are often shortages where teachers are most needed. It is unconscionable that we would offer our children in this state any less than the best possible educational resources. We have so many excellent dedicated teachers in the state now, but we could be losing them if we don't supply basic needs such as health care.

This is so important during this time of the pandemic. Teachers need leave for Covid and Covid related issues and mental health support services.

Pass HB 220—our teachers need health care. Our children need healthy teachers. The matter is very simple.

Sincerely,
Lisa Rininger
[REDACTED]
Seward, Alaska 99664

From: Dan Maclean [REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 4:48 PM

To: Rep. Zack Fields <Rep.Zack.Fields@akleg.gov>; Rep. Ivy Spohnholz <Rep.Ivy.Spohnholz@akleg.gov>; Rep. Calvin Schrage <Rep.Calvin.Schrage@akleg.gov>; Rep. Liz Snyder <Rep.Liz.Snyder@akleg.gov>; Rep. David Nelson <Rep.David.Nelson@akleg.gov>; Rep. James Kaufman <Rep.James.Kaufman@akleg.gov>; Rep. Ken McCarty <Rep.Ken.McCarty@akleg.gov>

Subject: Written testimony: Please support HB 220

I am writing this letter to urge your support for HB 220. I have been a teacher in the Anchorage School District since 2007, and am a concerned parent of three children in the Anchorage School District, and a super voter.

A child's classroom teacher more of an impact on their education than any other factor. The present Alaska retirement system actively discourages people from becoming teachers and encourages existing teachers to leave.

Alaska has a teacher shortage now. The Anchorage School District alone has 100 teaching for which no one has even applied. My understanding is that many rural school districts throughout the state have an even higher percentage of vacant positions. Predictions are the shortage will just continue to get worse.

Teacher turnover alone costs the state approximately \$20 million dollars per year. Just by becoming a teacher, you lose social security benefits earned at other jobs. The sooner you quit teaching, the sooner you can start re-earning the social security already lost. Under the present system, teachers have to leave teaching and it costs the state money.

HB 220 and a return to a defined benefit would cost the state and school districts no more than the present system. But it would increase teacher retention and reduce turnover costs.

There are multiple safe guards built into HB 220 to prevent another unfunded liability for the state.

Please support HB 220. It will save money immediately and provide a foundation for the future of Alaska.

Dan Maclean

To: House Labor and Commerce Committee

Date: 1/19/2022

Hello, my name is Mary Dooher. I am a Speech Language Pathologist working with the Mat-Su District. Please support House Bill 220 to encourage recruitment and retention of educators to Alaska, specifically the related service providers called speech pathologist, occupational therapists, physical therapist, and school psychologists.

I came from New York as a Speech Language Pathologist in 2010. Since I arrived, there has been a revolving door of the Tier 3 Related Service Providers. They stay for 1-2 years, then depart. They often leave before becoming fully vested. This forces districts to hire expensive non-employee contract providers and online Service Providers who are located in the Lower 48 rather than in-person.

As we have seen during the Pandemic, learning online is not as effective as in-person. This is doubly true for special education students, and Related Service Providers are the foundation of our special education system. However, the competition to go to another professional setting is intense.

Alaska used to be the premier state to work as an educator, and the students were the better for it. DEED reported in October 2021: "The magnitude of this . . . issue around teacher retention and recruitment demands an exceptional response. The coronavirus emergency has further exacerbated Alaska's teacher shortage and placed additional strain on our teaching workforce."

Under Tier 1 and 2, educators would stay because it was a good retirement. That motivation to stay no longer exists with the current tiers. Alaska is losing its educational expertise and that is costing our children dearly.

It is imperative that legislators make the necessary changes to the Retirement System to attract and retain educators, so Alaska once again becomes competitive in securing their talents. Otherwise, it is our Alaskan children's future that will suffer.

Sincerely,

Mary P. Dooher, CCC-SLP

Mat-Su Borough School District Speech Language Pathologist

Wasilla, Alaska

Email: [REDACTED]

From: [Laura Capelle](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Cc: [Rep. Grier Hopkins](#)
Subject: HB 220 written testimony
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 12:56:42 PM

I am writing in support of House Bill 220. As a 15-year educator in Fairbanks, I have had the pleasure and privilege of working with and on behalf of students in the English Language Learner (ELL) Program as a Tutor/Instructor and ELL Program Records Manager. I am fortunate and blessed to have a Tier II PRS retirement plan. In the course of my career, many times I have considered taking steps to complete a teacher certification program. However, attaining my teaching certification would force me out of the secure retirement plan to which I belong. Please advance HB 220, so people like me can have all educator career goals open, with the promise of a continued secure retirement.

Laura Capelle
Fairbanks

From: [Cindy Lelake](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Cc: [Rep. Laddie Shaw](#); [Sen. Joshua Revak](#)
Subject: HB 220
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 1:31:05 PM

Dear House Labor and Commerce Committee members:

I urge you to support HB 220. I believe the bill helps address significant shortcomings in Alaska's public employees retirement system for those employees hired after 2006, including educational support personnel, teachers, police officers, firefighters and Alaska State Troopers. Key "risk sharing" mechanisms included in the bill will protect the State of Alaska from the risk of unfunded liabilities, while providing a stable retirement for educators. Further, HB 220 is designed to cost the State of Alaska and school districts no more than the current PERS 4 and TRS 3 Defined Contribution retirement system.

I urge you to quickly pass HB 220 to its next committee of referral, and to consider co-sponsoring this worthy bill.

Sincerely,

Cindy Lelake
Anchorage

From: [Kyle Schneider](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: HB 220
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 5:33:21 PM

Good Evening:

My name is Kyle Schneider, and I am a TRS Tier III educator from Homer, AK. I have been an educator in Alaska since Fall 2008 (shortly after graduating from university), and once upon a time intended to retire here. Now, my wife (a PERS Tier IV employee) and I have no choice but to plan a move back to the Lower 48 in search of an actual retirement that could potentially benefit us after we retire.

I love Alaska. I love teaching Alaskans. I do not love TRS Tier III. While I watch my Tier II colleagues begin to finalize a plan for their imminent retirement, I can't even consider it for another 25 years, which is - coincidentally - how long our Tier II colleagues have to serve our state to be granted their retirement benefits and healthcare coverage at the defined value.

I have watched colleagues retire and begin new careers or seek advanced training, some before their 50th birthday, others completing a PERS Tier II retirement sequence on top of their TRS Tier I retirement, simply because they were afforded that opportunity based solely on when they were born and started teaching in the state.

Those of us hired after July 1, 2006, have long been told to bide our time and stick it out for the long fight. The reality, though, is quite different. Those giving such sage advice have the luxury of a Tier I or Tier II retirement, knowing full well that - no matter how long they live - their bills will be paid, their COLA will continue, and their healthcare will be covered.

Does the state which once prided itself in being one of the finest for teachers who commit have any concern for younger Alaskans? How are we to attract and keep educators if there continues to be no financial safety net?


We need to guarantee educators the right to retirement with the peace of mind our elder colleagues have.

We need a return to a Defined Benefit.

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Regards,
Kyle Schneider

[REDACTED]

From: 
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: HB 220
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 7:31:12 PM

Dear Chairs of the HLAC Committee,

Thank you for allowing public testimony today on HB 220.

My name is Kathy Simpler and I am a 26 year educator in Kodiak, Alaska. Kodiak, and Alaska, used to be the most desired place in the country to teach. People moved here to accept teaching positions and stayed to raise their families.

It hasn't been that way since 2006. In the last 15 years, I have seen great teachers stay for a year or two, get their Alaskan adventure, and then move out of the state. Educators are professionals with bachelor's degrees, and many, like myself, have earned a master's degree as well. Most of us went into this profession because of a secure retirement with benefits. Our passion is our students, not negotiating for raises, bonuses and the healthcare found in the private sector. Since 2006, Alaska hasn't invested in their public employees' future, so they look for work outside the state and take their family with them.

When public employees stay in their community, they buy homes, volunteer, develop relationships and become part of their community. They coach intra-murals, are deacons in their church and hold the fabric of their community together.

Our students lose when educators do not stay in their community. They lose out on trusted adults, mentors, and coaches. Those relationships with their trusted educators are important at any age, but are more important when they are turning into young adults and are learning how to navigate their future beyond high school.

These same teachers know that they can't put their unused sick leave towards retirement, so they use it all in a school year- it could be up to 13 days or more for them out of the classroom. Those absences don't help our students or school morale. When over half of our staff is in Tier 3, that's too many guest teachers over the course of a year, teaching our students.

I'm lucky. I'm in Tier 2 (but there is no-one else paying into that, in which case, I could outlive my retirement as well) but my children are being taught by tier 3 teachers- teachers who don't care about our community, my children, or making Kodiak their forever home. They are here for an Alaskan adventure and are counting the days until the ferry can take them away.

Please pass HB 220. Our students deserve the best. Our communities are struggling

with a transient workforce. The people who serve the public are our best resource and they should be compensated for it.

Thank you,
Kathy Simpler
Kodiak

From: [Mike Miller](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Cc: [Rep. Kelly Merrick](#); [Rep. Ken McCarty](#)
Subject: HB 220
Date: Thursday, January 20, 2022 1:39:33 PM

Good afternoon, Madam Chair-

I recently testified before the House Labor and Commerce Committee and had prepared this statement because I was not sure I would get the opportunity to speak. Some of these thoughts I expressed, and some were not mentioned. I want to share the completeness of my experience and how the proposed legislation affects me.

My name is Mike Miller, I am a resident of House District 14 in Eagle River, and I am writing to support passage of HB 220. Like many Alaskans before me, I was not born here, and I am a resident by choice. I first moved to Alaska in 1980 as an Army dependent and that experience had me yearning to return. Military life means moving every four years, and I reestablished residency in 1989 while on active duty with the United States Air Force (USAF). Alaska is where my children and grandchildren were born, and the opportunities available to shape their future are among my concerns. Change is needed to help keep future generations of Alaskans from leaving or not accepting public servant jobs because they lack the sustainable financial security that families need to thrive.

I consider myself fortunate to have the privilege of serving my country and the State of Alaska. I use the word “fortunate” because I am a PERS Tier III employee. I have worked for the Child Support Services Division for more than twenty years and currently hold the Program Manager position. I have seventy-five Position Control Numbers (PCN) assigned under my span-of control. These dedicated professionals enforce child support orders and investigate those who do not fulfill their obligations. PCN vacancies are increasing instead of being filled by Alaskans. My job is to identify and nurture talent; however, I need more to retain it. While the promise of a pension is not the only challenge leaders face, it is a significant one you can take steps to eliminate by moving HB 220 forward.

The future of Public Employee jobs not filled by the children of us who settled here is becoming a reality. It is a sad day when our children accept employment in other states that offer the security of a Defined Benefit retirement. I am writing to share my experience as a Public Employee. I share another experience with anyone with school-age children, and I would be remiss if I did not mention the shared plight of teachers who would benefit from this proposed legislation. This awful pandemic has given many of us a new appreciation for teachers – a different perspective of the challenges faced by them because of our kids. I have welcome and unwelcome memories of my time in the service; I can say the same of my experience with virtual learning last school year. It transcends the memories of that teacher who believed that I could achieve and become more than I thought we could. Alaskans teaching our children and grandchildren is a legacy I would like to maintain.

The competitive nature of retaining talent in Alaska requires more than the adventurous spirit that calls them here. The job security that makes people stay in Alaska forever instead of visiting before they die is the direction I am hopeful this committee can lead us. I thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of HB 220 and urge you to support this critical piece of legislation.

Thank you,
-mm

Mike Miller
Eagle River, AK

From: [Gwenna Corvez](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#); [Sen. Jesse Kiehl](#); [Rep. Sara Hannan](#)
Subject: HB220 Support
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 4:55:05 PM

Dear Representatives,

After 13 years as a teacher, I joke around that I'll need to teach another 40 to 45 years before I can retire. The problem is, it's not really a joke. We need a better retirement system for Tier III teachers. Please support HB220!

Thank you,

Gwenna Corvez

Kindergarten Teacher at Harborview Elementary

From: [Michael Still](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: Hb220
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 10:07:56 PM

Please support hb220. We need to bring education back to Alaskans by providing and retaining quality educators. Hb220 is. Much needed improvement for Alaskan educators that will help keep our best from leaving Alaska in search of more competitive offers as well as draw in outside talent.

Mike

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Regards,
Mike Still
Teacher, Photographer, Writer



From: [Scott Favorite](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: HB220
Date: Thursday, January 20, 2022 7:57:18 AM

Thank you for hearing this bill

I am 58 and an 11 year Tier 4 Employee

WEP was designed for people with pensions

A “contribution” is not a pension

When my DC runs out, Social Security remains permanently reduced

Because AK has the only public employees without a pension in the nation

I don't believe lawmakers fully considered the ramifications of WEP to AK Tier 4

I have already earned my SS benefit but because of WEP
My decision to work for the State of AK has destroyed my SS benefit

It is just a matter of time before this is addressed
But for many, it will be too late

Thank you for considering HB220

Scott Favorite

From: [REDACTED]
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#); [Rep. Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins](#); [Sen. Bert Stedman](#)
Subject: I am writing in support of HB 220
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 2:27:12 PM

Dear Honorable Members of the Alaska Legislature,

My name is Ginger Evens, from Petersburg, and I am writing in support of HB 220. As a recent retiree, I know first hand the important role teachers play in the health of a community and Alaska. Teachers help to shape the minds of Alaska's greatest asset, children.

Unfortunately, Alaska is having a difficult time hiring and retaining teachers. Teacher turnover in Alaska not only impacts the education of students, but also the finances of school districts. School districts with high teacher retention see a higher reading proficiency, whereas districts that experience high rates of teacher turnover, reading proficiency is much lower. According to a study done by Dianne Hirshberg from the University of Alaska Center for Education Policy Research at ISER, districts with higher retention of teachers, have an 85.5% proficiency rate and districts with lower retention of teachers, have a 46.9% proficiency rate.

The current retirement system in Alaska is one of the main factors when teachers decide to leave the profession or leave the state to seek employment elsewhere. Now is the time to change the retirement system in Alaska. It is time for Alaska to return to a defined benefits retirement system.

I urge you to move HB 220 from the House Labor and Commerce Committee to the House Finance Committee.

Sincerely,

Ginger Evens
[REDACTED]

From: [Theodore Eischeid](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Cc: [Rep. Ivy Spohnholz](#); [Sen. Bill Wielechowski](#)
Subject: I support HB 220
Date: Friday, January 21, 2022 10:06:37 AM

Dear honorable committee members,

I am writing in support of HB 220 which would create a defined benefits pension option for Alaska public employees. I believe the bill is conservative while addressing an ongoing problem- attracting and retaining the best public employees, the critical “infrastructure” providing essential services to our citizens.

I am fortunate in that I retired from a public service job in another state that had a defined benefit pension program. My pension has provided me a certain economic security that newer Alaska public employees lack. I know this because I decided to go back to work for the Mat-Su Borough as a planner after I came to Alaska. I missed working, and was pleased to serve the public once again in my new home of Alaska.

However, since I started work here five years ago I have seen our planning department hindered by turnover. Indeed, in my planning division I am the most senior employee. My younger colleagues talk about vesting their five years in and then moving on. This turnover costs the MSB money and impacts our services to citizens. My wife works with educational employees in rural Alaska and sees the same retention and turnover issues. The current defined contribution system is broken.

Please consider how HB 220 will give our public employees choice and incentive to stay. It will help us attract new public employees. It will help keep our public employees in Alaska after they retire, providing our citizens with the economic and social contribution economically secure retirees can provide.

Make the slogan “north to the future” one that includes a public employee pension option. Let’s solve the retention problem in our public employee infrastructure. Please support HB 220.

Thank you.

Ted Eischeid



Anchorage AK 99508

From: [Rebecca Bezdecny](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#); [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: Support for HB220
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 10:37:17 PM

Hello,

I am writing on behalf of my husband and myself in support of HB220.

My husband is a teacher. I am a state employee. We were both raised in Alaska, left Alaska, but decided to come back home in 2015.

Our current retirement plan as an educator and public servant is to work until we die. I wish I was being flippant. I am not. Perhaps we'll be forced to leave the state if the plan of working until we die doesn't pan out.

Any positive changes to the current Alaska retirement is a step that needs to be taken. Please support HB220.

Thanks for reading.

Sincerely,
Rebecca and Steven Bezdecny

From: [Kailee Martinsen](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Cc: [Rep. Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins](#); [Sen. Bert Stedman](#)
Subject: Support HB220
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 3:56:05 PM

Hello,

My name is Kailee Martinsen. I am writing to you from Sitka in support of HB220. Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony from the public today.

I am writing to you today because I care deeply for Alaska's children. I grew up in Sitka, graduated from Sitka High, got my degree in teaching, and returned to Sitka to further pursue my career in Special Education. When I was first hired those 4 short years ago, retirement was not important to me. As a young adult, retirement is that word you hear your parents say and feel it can't ever apply to you. However, it wasn't until this last year that I heard about the status of Alaska's teacher retirement. I was shocked, upset, and disappointed by what I heard. How are we as educators supposed to put our life into this career when there will be no way we can hope to retire when we are done? All growing up I heard teachers, doctors, policemen and politicians speak on how they want to encourage Alaska's youth to find a skill that they can turn around and share with the people of their communities. I followed that call, but now have considered leaving the profession even though it is something I care about passionately.

Educators are burning out.

We are exhausted and we feel no one is listening to our cries for help.

We put our life and soul into our profession and the children we serve, but we will not see a hope of retirement if this system continues.

Without our state restoring a retirement system for our teachers, qualified educators will continue to leave in droves. Our staffing shortages will continue, thus feeding the vicious cycle of teacher burn out. What is even worse is this retirement system affects me daily, and I'm not even close to retiring! We have an immense shortage of special education staff in our state. We do not have enough quality educators to support all of our students. We will not be able to recruit and retain quality educators until our retirement system is fixed. If you want keep hold of the teachers you have, recruit Alaskan students into the field of education, and grow Alaska's future, please, I beg of you, support HB220.

Without it, Alaska will be without its teachers.

Thank you,

Kailee Martinsen

Special Education Case Manager

Baranof Elementary School

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

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From: [Sara Hottinger](#)
To: [House Labor and Commerce](#)
Subject: Support of HB 220
Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 3:05:14 PM

Hello,

I am an Alaska educator that was hired under TRS III. I have 8 years of experience as a high school teacher and I truly believe that I am investing my life and my energy into educating Alaska's youth. Returning the favor and investing in a viable retirement option is the respect that Alaska educators deserve.

With mounting pressures in education, including pandemic teaching, teacher retention should be a major concern for the citizens of Alaska. Creating a stronger benefit package would mean talented educators would stay longer in their field and in their position.

Please consider passing HB 220 to ensure the best education possible for Alaska's youth.

Thank you,
Sara Hottinger

From: [Moriah Mercereau](#)
To: [Rep. Zack Fields](#); [Rep. Ivy Spohnholz](#); [Rep. Calvin Schrage](#); [Rep. Liz Snyder](#); [Rep. David Nelson](#); [representative.james.kaufman@akleg.gov](#); [Rep. Ken McCarty](#)
Subject: HB 220
Date: Tuesday, January 25, 2022 2:46:59 PM

Good afternoon,

I am writing in favor of HB 220. As a lifelong Alaskan and proud school counselor I implore you to pass HB 220 and bring back the Defined Benefits retirement plan. When I graduated from East High School, I went to college and then straight on to graduate school. I graduated with my Masters Degree in Education in 2007 and started that fall with ASD. I love working as a school counselor and now have a family of my own so the subject of retirement and how we provide for ourselves and our kids as we get older is definitely on our minds. Allowing those of us who started after 2006 the option to join the Defined Benefits plan will give peace of mind and provide some stability for the next chapter of our lives. As an educator in Anchorage I am an asset to my state, my community and my school. I love my job and helping our students reach their full potential, I deserve to be a part of a robust retirement plan. I don't want to leave ASD or this state, but if things continue on the same path, my family might have to look for other options. Please pass HB 220 and allow all educators the right to choose what retirement plan works for them.

Thank you for your consideration.
Moriah Mercereau