

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 20, 2009

8:58 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Paul Seaton, Chair  
Representative Cathy Engstrom Munoz, Vice Chair  
Representative Wes Keller  
Representative Peggy Wilson  
Representative Robert L. "Bob" Buch  
Representative Berta Gardner

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Bryce Edgmon

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 137

"An Act relating to an interstate compact on educational opportunity for military children; amending Rules 4 and 24, Alaska Rules of Civil Procedure; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 137

SHORT TITLE: COMPACT: EDUCATION OF MILITARY CHILDREN

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) COGHILL

02/16/09	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/16/09	(H)	EDC, JUD, FIN
03/20/09	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

KAREN LIDSTER, Staff  
Representative John Coghill  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 137, on behalf of Representative Coghill, prime sponsor.

THOMAS HINTON, Senior State Liaison  
Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense

U. S. Department of Defense  
Arlington, VA

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During hearing of HB 137, discussed the proposed compact and related support for it.

RICK MASTERS, Special Council for Interstate Compacts  
Council of State Governments  
Lexington, KY

**POSITION STATEMENT:** During hearing of HB 137, discussed the proposed compact and related CSG's support for HB 137.

MARK SAN SOUCI, Regional Liaison for Military Families  
Northwest Region  
Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
Lakewood, Washington

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Discussed the proposed interstate compact, and testified in support of HB 137.

CAROL COMEAU, Superintendant  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 137.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:58:02 AM](#)

**CHAIR PAUL SEATON** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:58 a.m. Representatives Seaton, Keller, Munoz, Wilson, Gardner, and Buch were present at the call to order.

HB 137-COMPACT: EDUCATION OF MILITARY CHILDREN

[8:58:43 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 137, "An Act relating to an interstate compact on educational opportunity for military children; amending Rules 4 and 24, Alaska Rules of Civil Procedure; and providing for an effective date."

[8:59:30 AM](#)

KAREN LIDSTER, Staff, Representative John Coghill, Alaska State Legislature, speaking on behalf of the sponsor of HB 137,

Representative Coghill, paraphrased from the following written sponsor statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The purpose of House Bill 137 is to eliminate some of the barriers that face children of military personnel as they transition from one school system to another. The average student will move from six to nine times from kindergarten to 12th grade.

While the armed services has done much to ease the transition for children of military personnel, there is much that can be done at the state and local levels to ensure that these children are afforded the same opportunities for educational success as other children.

Alaska enjoys a close relationship with our service men and women and their families and recognizes the sacrifice and stress they face with frequent moves and deployment. There are 12,106 active duty children between the ages of five and 18 plus the children of active members of the guard and reserve that will benefit from this compact.

Eleven states in 2008 adopted this compact and presently 22 states have pending legislation to join the compact. Passing this legislation will help remove some of that stress by providing the children timely enrollment as the children move from one school district to another.

[9:02:02 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON, upon Ms. Lidster's offer to review the sectional analysis of HB 137, suggested reviewing the sectional analysis at a later hearing, once public testimony has concluded.

[9:02:16 AM](#)

THOMAS HINTON, Senior State Liaison, Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, U. S. Department of Defense, related that a few years ago the U.S. Department of Defense realized there are a number of issues impacting military families of the nation that the federal government couldn't and shouldn't address. Therefore, assistance for military families was sought from the states, which have been very responsive. This legislation

addresses an issue that is at the top of the list of issues impacting military families. Mr. Hinton opined that this is a matter of readiness. In other words, if military personnel in the field are worried about how their children are doing in school, then they don't have their mind on the task at hand. Furthermore, if the children of military personnel aren't well cared for, personnel decide to leave the service. As was mentioned, 11 states joined this compact, with 20 others reviewing the possibility. The compact became active last year. As of 2009 Mississippi joined the compact and Virginia is poised to join as well. Mr. Hinton explained that prior to the compact school transitions for military children were handled on a state-by-state and even a district-by-district basis, which proved ineffective. Therefore, the transition between states was problematic, which led to the realization of the need to address the issue in a comprehensive fashion. After discovering the vehicle of interstate compact, in 2006 an advisory group was formed that was followed by a drafting group. He mentioned the following interest groups from around the country that were involved, including: National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Military Family Association, Military Child Education Coalition, National School Boards Association, National PTA, National Association of State Boards of Education, National Education Association, Military Impacted Schools Association, and Education Commission of the States. In conclusion, Mr. Hinton expressed his appreciation for the committee having HB 137 on its agenda and the partnership with the Council of State Governments (CSG) on this issue.

[9:10:34 AM](#)

RICK MASTERS, Special Council for Interstate Compacts, Council of State Governments, informed the committee that the Council of State Governments is dedicated to the notion that initiatives, such as this proposed compact, that are traditionally managed by the states ought to continue to be managed by the states. When there is a problem that transcends the border of one state and requires joint action, it's preferable to do so collectively rather than be dictated by the federal government. The U.S. Department of Defense agrees, he noted. Mr. Masters mentioned that he has worked on several interstate compacts, several of which have been considered or adopted by the Alaska State Legislature. Compacts, he explained, allow the states to collectively make decisions and allow for certain uniformities unless the federal government preempts the field. In this case, when military children are moving about the country, these children encounter many situations in which they have to be

transferred from one public school district to another. Although Alaska and other states are doing a very credible job within the state, the problem is when the transfer is out of state. The question is whether the military child will receive the same accommodations that Alaska and other states provide. Therefore, this compact seeks to solve the aforementioned. Research has identified the following four areas in which problems occur for military children. First, some states have enrollment requirements, such as requiring an original record, that delay a student beginning class. The compact would call for the acceptance of a copy/facsimile of a record that appears to be genuine and require the certified credentials within 10 days of the student's enrollment. Second, eligibility, a student may enter a school too late to participate in school activities/teams. The compact merely requests that the state makes available to a student that is otherwise qualified, the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. Third, placement, a student is placed at the same level as he/she was placed in their prior school. This compact doesn't require Alaska or any other state to accept that placement without question. The compact merely says that a placement issue shouldn't prevent a student from enrolling. Once a student is enrolled, the student can be tested to ensure proper placement. Fourth, on-time graduation is one of the most important goals of military children. Military children may face a delayed graduation because they don't meet the local history requirement studies or other course requirements, even if such requirements were met in the sending state. The compact seeks to accommodate military students who move in their junior or senior year in order to ensure they graduate on time. Therefore, the compact requests that the receiving state substitute courses and/or recognize some alternative testing in lieu of an exit exam, when possible. If the aforementioned isn't possible, the receiving state is asked to work with the sending state to ensure that the student receives a diploma from the sending state.

[9:16:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON suggested that [the tenets of this proposed compact] should be carried through for all students, not just military students. She pointed out that any child who has to move a lot would face the same challenges as military children. She encouraged CSG to review helping other student's transition between states.

MR. MASTERS said that it's on CSG's radar screen.

9:17:31 AM

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH asked if there will be a work session on this issue at the upcoming CSG meeting.

MR. MASTERS related his belief that this issue will be on the agenda for upcoming CSG meetings.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH expressed his interest in serving on the CSG, and he lobbied Mr. Masters for a recommendation.

MR. MASTERS agreed to advocate for Representative Buch's participation with CSG.

9:19:33 AM

MARK SAN SOUCI, Regional Liaison for Military Families, Northwest Region, Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense, said that he is considered Alaska's local contact. In response to Representative Wilson's comments, Mr. San Souci related that study has been done regarding whether this interstate compact should be considered for all children. The strategic decision was to focus on military children now because military children are different in that they are moving because their parents are doing so to serve the nation. However, he indicated that this interstate compact could be leveraged to pursue its use in the future for other children. Mr. San Souci then related some anecdotal stories of situations in which military children were adversely impacted by moving to new schools. For example, a 15-year-old girl who reached All American cheerleader status in Oklahoma missed the tryouts in the state to which her family was transferred and was unable to cheer. The aforementioned is an example of what this compact is trying to address. He then related a situation in which a boy passed the high school qualifying exam in Texas, but was told upon moving to the State of Washington that he had to take the high school qualifying exam in Washington and take all the courses required to pass that exam. However, due to the extraordinary persistence of the parents, the receiving school district waived the requirement to pass its high school qualifying exam. He then related a situation in which the interpretation of grades between states impacted a young man's ability to obtain a scholarship for. He noted that the committee packet should also include examples in which HB 137 would've been helpful.

[9:28:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER related her understanding that HB 137 is identical to the proposals in other states, save the necessary drafting style of the Alaska Statutes.

MR. MASTERS replied yes it's materially the same as the compact adopted by other states. Mr. Masters related CSG's support of HB 137.

[9:30:03 AM](#)

MR. HINTON related his and Mr. San Souci's support of HB 137.

[9:30:23 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON opined that he is supportive of military families. He then noted that parents often make decisions based on what is good for their children. Chair Seaton stated his intent to hold HB 137 to hear departmental testimony at a future meeting.

[9:31:17 AM](#)

CAROL COMEAU, Superintendant, Anchorage School District, related her personal support for HB 137. She noted that the Anchorage School Board has drafted a resolution in support of this proposed compact, which she hopes will be approved. She noted that she has recommended support for HB 137. Upon review of the compact, she said she believes that the proposed compact strengthens the [Anchorage School District's] commitment to continue to implement most of the practices that it outlines. Still, the compact sends a very strong message to the schools in the state that military families deserve consideration and support so that the children can make successful transitions. She agreed with earlier testimony that parents shouldn't have to figure out how to navigate the system and advocate for their children regarding issues that [recur with military children transitioning into new schools].

[9:34:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER inquired as to why these provisions should not apply to all children.

MS. COMEAU indicated her agreement with earlier comments regarding focusing on military children at this time. However, she noted that [the Anchorage School District] has implemented similar procedures for other students in transition and recommended further discussion with the Anchorage School District and Anchorage School Board regarding other students. She noted that the Anchorage School District does offer many transition programs.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER pointed out that it doesn't matter to the child who is moving from school-to-school whether it's because of military assignments or not. Either way a child transitioning from school-to-school "is in the same boat."

MS. COMEAU said that she didn't disagree, but recalled from the last military deployment that there is a higher level of stress on military families.

[9:35:46 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON closed public testimony. He then reviewed the contents of the HB 137 packet.

[9:36:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BUCH qualified his interest in serving on CSG and related that the information he learns affords him the ability to be a better advocate for students.

[9:37:48 AM](#)

CHAIR SEATON stated that HB 137 would be held.

[9:40:01 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:40 a.m.