

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 4, 2021

3:02 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins, Chair  
Representative Geran Tarr  
Representative Andi Story  
Representative Matt Claman  
Representative Sarah Vance  
Representative James Kaufman  
Representative David Eastman

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 18

"An Act relating to national board certification for public school teachers."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 62

"An Act relating to solemnization of marriage."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 18

SHORT TITLE: TEACHERS: NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) KREISS-TOMKINS

02/18/21	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
02/18/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/18/21	(H)	STA, EDC
02/25/21	(H)	STA AT 3:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
02/25/21	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
03/02/21	(H)	STA AT 3:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/02/21	(H)	Heard & Held
03/02/21	(H)	MINUTE(STA)
03/04/21	(H)	STA AT 3:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 62

SHORT TITLE: MARRIAGE WITNESSES

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) CLAMAN

02/18/21	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/15/21
02/18/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/18/21	(H)	STA, JUD
02/25/21	(H)	STA AT 3:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
02/25/21	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
03/04/21	(H)	STA AT 3:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

**WITNESS REGISTER**

LISA PARADY, PhD, Executive Director  
Alaska Council of School Administrators  
Alaska Superintendents Association  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided invited testimony in support of HB 18.

TOM KLAAMEYER, President  
National Education Association - Alaska  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided invited testimony pertaining to HB 18.

SOPHIE JONAS, Staff  
Representative Matt Claman  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented a sectional analysis of HB 62, on behalf of Representative Claman, prime sponsor.

CIAN MULHERN, Reverend  
Celtic Ministries  
Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided invited testimony pertaining to HB 62.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:02:23 PM](#)

**CHAIR JONATHAN KREISS-TOMKINS** called the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:02 p.m. Representatives Story, Vance, Claman, Tarr, Kaufman, and Kreiss-

Tomkins were present at the call to order. Representative Eastman arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**HB 18-TEACHERS: NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION**

[3:04:55 PM](#)

CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 18, "An Act relating to national board certification for public school teachers."

CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS announced the committee would hear invited testimony.

[3:05:40 PM](#)

LISA PARADY, PhD, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA)/Alaska Superintendents Association (ASA), testified in support of HB 18. She stated ASA's belief that supporting national board certification for public school teachers is important, adding that every Alaska student deserves a qualified teacher and promoting national board certification is an "excellent" pathway to achieving that goal. A primary purpose of ACSA is to provide a collective voice for Alaska's school superintendents, K-12 principals, school business officials, and all school administrators who work hard to serve students across Alaska. Furthermore, ACSA identified that recruiting, retaining, and preparing qualified educators as a top priority for Alaska schools. She said research demonstrates that teacher quality is the most influential school-based factor in student achievement, and national board certification promotes teacher quality by encouraging teachers to reach the highest available benchmarks in their field. She reported that as of 2019, Alaska is ranked twenty-fifth in the nation for percentage of teachers receiving national board certification with 2.57 percent certified. She noted that ACSA supports the ambitious goal set out in this legislation of 4 percent of Alaska teachers receiving national board certification. She relayed that certification costs \$1,900 plus a registration fee of \$75 and typically takes three years to complete. Certification is administered by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) - a nonprofit organization - who's mission is "to advance the quality of teaching and learning by maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and ... do, and by providing a national voluntary system certifying teachers who meet these standards." She explained that candidates for

national board certification must complete four components: content knowledge; differentiation and instruction; teaching practice and learning environment; and effective and reflective practitioner. Teachers must submit all four components within the first three years of their candidacy. She further noted that there is a limited five-year window to achieve certification.

[3:09:15 PM](#)

DR. PARADY relayed that by comparison, Alaska has 202 nationally board certified teachers and 23 current candidates; Hawaii has 728 nationally board certified teachers and 239 current candidates; and Washington has 11,521 nationally board certified teachers and 1,600 candidates. She indicated that there are different levels of incentives to support national board certification. For example, in 1998, Washington's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction offered to fund 50 percent of the application fees for 35-40 candidates per year through a grant program. Furthermore, in 1999, the Washington State Legislature allocated \$327,000 for 15 percent salary increases for teachers with national board certification over the following two years. She added that currently, teachers achieving certification in Washington receive a salary enhancement of \$3,500 per year; national board certification also fulfills the initial certification requirements for a Washington state professional level certificate. She went on to note that in many cases, teachers who hold national board certification are recognized as leaders and take on enhanced leadership roles, which is important for developing new teachers who receive mentorship. Consequently, she indicated that national board certification can improve new teacher quality and retention. In closing, she stated increasing the share of Alaska teachers with national board certification is an important step along with comprehensively addressing teacher recruitment and retention to improve Alaska schools for all students. She said ACSA/ASA is proud to support this policy and the goal of providing an effective teacher for all students. She advised the committee to review the letter of support from ASA [included in the committee packet].

[3:12:20 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN questioned how a teacher maintains national board certification and what it costs.

DR. PARADY shared her belief that there is no additional cost once certification is obtained.

3:13:04 PM

REPRESENTATIVE STORY pointed out that national board certification is potentially limited to teachers with adequate income and available time. She emphasized the importance of considering equity in regard to obtaining national board certification. In reference to the incentives offered by the State of Washington, she recalled speaking to a legislator who said given another chance, the monetary incentive would have been awarded to teachers who work in high-poverty schools due to the shortage of teachers high-poverty areas. She asked if ACSA/ASA has considered creating a scholarship fund for teachers seeking their national board certification.

DR. PARADY said the Alaska Staff Development Network (ASDN) - the largest provider of professional development for educators in Alaska - is one of the organizations under the umbrella association of ACSA. She explained that in ASDN working on the Increasing Performance and Retention in Alaska's Rural Schools (IPRARS) [grant] in partnership with Alaska Gateway School District, Nenana School District, Northwest Arctic Borough School District, and Yukon-Koyukuk School District to increase the number of teachers with national board certification. The program would support teachers' tuition and provide collaborative and motivational processes via monthly meetings, pooling of questions, and peer support. She said the idea is to pilot the program to see if it increases the number of board-certified teachers across Alaska; if successful, the program could be replicated in other parts of the state. Although it's not a scholarship, she said, ACSA is trying to support teachers in achieving this rigorous certification.

3:18:26 PM

TOM KLAAMEYER, President, National Education Association - Alaska (NEA-AK), thanked Chair Kreiss-Tomkins for introducing this legislation and jumpstarting the conversation about excellent educators. He provided a brief explanation of his professional background, highlighting his 25 years of experience as an educator in Anchorage. He said national board certification is an advanced certification beyond Alaska licensure that is considered it a "true mark of excellence" and a teaching professional's highest credential. He relayed the level of difficulty involved via a colleague's description as

"one of the most difficult things they've ever done - even more so than earning their master's degree." One of the key characteristics of the process, he said, is the intense scrutiny that educators place on their own pedagogy through self-analysis and meticulous analysis of their own work to improve their classroom practices. He suggested that this legislation could go a long way in addressing two difficulties that exist in Alaska's professional education system: student achievement and teacher retention. He indicated that across the nation, student outcomes of nationally board certified teachers are greater than those with state licensure. A 2017 study in Mississippi found students of teachers with national board certification were more likely to receive a proficient score on key literacy assessments than their peers, specifically in kindergarten and third grade. Additionally, a multi-year study in Washington suggested that students of teachers with national board certification learned the equivalent of an additional one and a half months'-worth of learning in the school year than students of other teachers. Another study by Harvard University's Strategic Data Project showed similar results in the Los Angeles County Unified School District.

[3:23:28 PM](#)

MR. KLAAEMEYER went on to address the teacher "traction" and retention crisis in Alaska. According to the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), teacher turnover in Alaska can reach 20-30 percent with "spike years" reaching even higher in many rural districts. Other states, such as Florida, South Carolina, and Ohio have demonstrated national board certification as a proven tool in retaining excellent educators. South Carolina, for example, demonstrated that teachers who hold national board certification are three times more likely to stay than teachers without that certification. Furthermore, he pointed out that teachers with national board certification become mentors for other teachers, especially those in their early career, indicating that national certification impacts students, other educators, and students of those educators, creating system-wide improvement rather than isolated pockets of excellence. Mr. Klaemeyer informed the committee that NEA-AK wholeheartedly supports efforts to increase the number of teachers with national board certification in Alaska. Nonetheless, he suggested creating a financial incentive program that goes beyond recognizing certification by helping teachers achieve that goal. He reported that national board certification costs around \$2,000 to apply for initial certification and another \$50-\$60 plus \$500 in fees for renewal

purposes every five years. Contrary to Dr. Parady's testimony, he reported that Washington and Alabama provided an annual incentive of up to \$5,000 plus an additional \$5,000 per year for working in high-needs districts. He noted that the same approach was taken in the Thirtieth Alaska Legislature in Senate Bill 188. He reported that Delaware pays a 12 percent premium on top of a base salary for teachers with national board certification. Additionally, there are at least 25 other states that offer a financial remuneration for nationally board certified teachers who have invested the time, money, and dedication required to earn this distinction.

[3:28:04 PM](#)

MR. KLAAMEYR highlighted NEA-AK's annual jumpstart program - an intensive, one-week institute for members that provides support and guidance through the national board certification application process. He reminded the committee that there are currently 202 teachers with national board certification in Alaska and 23 candidates who have applied. He recalled that according to ISER, the cost associated with replacing a teacher who leaves is \$20,000 for recruitment and training. He indicated that investing in educators by providing an annual incentive would save the state money, help keep quality teachers in Alaska, and increase outcomes for students in this state.

[3:30:11 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR pointed out that teaching is not a highly paid profession. She expressed concern that despite their interest in national board certification, teachers might not be able to afford it. She aspired for a situation in which any interested educator would have access, regardless of his/her ability to pay.

CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS noted that the bill was drafted from a modest starting point given the state of the budget. He emphasized his robust support for every incentive the state could offer, adding that it would be in Alaska's interest to have every educator on a path to self-improvement. He approximated that reimbursing the fees for national board certification would cost around \$100,000 and went on to say it would be an incredible return on investment for Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR agreed that with only 23 applicants, the state could afford to support a class of that size.

REPRESENTATIVE KAUFMAN questioned whether there is an actual cost to the state that is not yet apparent. Furthermore, he requested more data regarding the efficacy of national board certification, such that the cause and effect is substantiated.

[3:33:45 PM](#)

MR. KLAAEMEYER offered to provide citations for the research referenced in his testimony. In response to Representative Tarr, he said some districts in Alaska are already providing an annual bonus, although none terribly sizeable. He added that in terms of paying for the national board certification itself, most [incentives] tend to recognize that achievement through a bonus, salary premium, or rebate for costs. He expressed interest in taking a novel approach to assistance in the form of upfront loans for those that can't afford it, which are then forgiven after certification is earned.

[3:35:10 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE expressed her concern about passing a law that requires schools to post a sign. Instead, she suggested looking at what local school districts are already doing and incentivizing them to engage in the process and to support the teachers they have. She also recommended grants, scholarships, and solutions that don't look to the state to fill this need.

CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS asked Dr. Parady to comment on Representative Vance's question from a district perspective.

[3:37:15 PM](#)

DR. PARADY acknowledged the importance of local support and focusing on programs and initiatives that best support school districts; further, she agreed that pursuing grants is a good idea. Nonetheless, she said many states recognize that [national board certification] is so rigorous that it's worth investment. She reiterated that the long-term results produce increased student achievement; therefore, it's worth approaching from multiple angles, including local incentivization and support, as well as incentives directly related to obtaining national board certification.

[3:39:17 PM](#)

CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS opened public testimony on HB 18. After ascertaining that no one wished to testify, he closed public testimony.

CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS announced that HB 18 was held over.

### **HB 62-MARRIAGE WITNESSES**

[3:40:15 PM](#)

CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 62, "An Act relating to solemnization of marriage."

[3:40:42 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN, as prime sponsor, introduced HB 62 by paraphrasing the sponsor statement [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

At present, during the solemnization of marriage, couples must assent to the marriage in the presence of each other, the person solemnizing the marriage, and at least two additional witnesses. Afterward, all parties must sign the marriage certificates. House Bill 62 would eliminate the requirements of any additional witnesses at the marriage solemnization and the signatures of these witnesses on marriage certificates in an effort to help support Alaska's destination wedding industry while preserving the integrity of marriage solemnizations.

Alaska is one of 20 states that require two wedding witnesses—the upper limit of wedding witness requirements nationwide. Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia do not require wedding witnesses at all. Wedding witnesses played a more critical role in past centuries when record keeping was less automated. Witnesses could be contacted to verify the wedding had taken place in the event that records were damaged or missing. Today, however, the role of a wedding witness is ceremonial. In Alaska, while the person solemnizing the marriage must meet certain criteria, no form of witness verification (proof of identification, language comprehension, address validation, etc.) is required. HB 62 would allow

Alaska to compete with states like Hawaii and Florida, which require no wedding witnesses and lead the nation in destination weddings.

Destination weddings are a growing business in Alaska, especially as couples opt for small, intimate ceremonies rather than large ones due to risks associated with COVID-19. But the requirement of two wedding witnesses makes Alaska a less attractive location for many who travel from farther away or who do not want the financial burden of a larger wedding.

Couples who come to the state without their own witnesses are tasked with finding strangers to witness their wedding. The burden of supplying these witnesses often falls to those who work in Alaska's wedding industry who ask friends and family to witness the weddings of their out-of-town clients. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is hard for out-of-state couples to find two witnesses and couples may be reluctant to have strangers as their wedding witnesses. The additional witness requirement can also place an increased financial burden on the couple. For example, for a remote location wedding, such as a glacier, the couple must pay extra seating costs to transport the witnesses.

At present, destination weddings bring in an estimated \$1 million in revenue to Alaska in the form of roughly 500 destination weddings a year. This revenue figure doesn't consider the fact that more than 90% of the out-of-state couples who come to Alaska to get married stay for days and weeks to explore our great state. The resulting benefit to Alaska's tourism industry is substantial.

[3:44:12 PM](#)

SOPHIE JONAS, Staff, Representative Matt Claman, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Claman, prime sponsor, presented a sectional analysis of HB 62 [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**Section 1**

*AS 25.05.301. Form of solemnization.*

Eliminates requirement of two witnesses at a marriage solemnization ceremony.

**Section 2**

*AS 25.05.321. Certificates.*

Eliminates requirement of the signatures of two witnesses on marriage certificates.

**Section 3**

*AS 25.05.361. Unlawful solemnization of marriage.*

Deletes language to conform with changes made in section 1 of the bill.

**Section 4**

*AS 25.05.041. Matters insufficient to render marriage voidable.*

Repeals subsections (a)(3) and (a)(5) to conform with changes made in section 1 of the bill.

[3:45:04 PM](#)

MS. JONAS introduced a testimonial video, which was viewed by the committee from 3:45 p.m. to 3:49 p.m.

[3:49:10 PM](#)

CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS recalled hearing this legislation two years ago. He offered his belief that "it was great legislation, and nothing has changed."

[3:49:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAUFMAN asked whether weddings are taking place via Zoom. After receiving confirmation, he asked if the bill would affect Zoom weddings.

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN stated that the bill would not affect weddings attended via Zoom. Further, he shared his understanding that the witness requirement could not be satisfied by a Zoom witness and would still require a person to be physically present. He questioned why Alaska is still following a law from 1700s-era England, during which time the church was keeping records instead of the state. He reiterated that people are attending weddings via Zoom, but this bill has no impact on that.

[3:51:06 PM](#)

CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS announced the committee would hear invited testimony.

[3:51:38 PM](#)

CIAN MULHERN, Reverend, Celtic Ministries, informed the committee that he is an ordained minister with 21 years of experience performing weddings in other states, including those with no witness requirement. He said this is a big problem in Alaska, noting that over 90 percent of his clientele are coming from other parts of the world and don't know anyone in the state. He explained that couples become uneasy when they are required to have a stranger attend their wedding as a witness, especially during the exchange of vows. Furthermore, he reported that witnesses are not being used to verify the couples' identity - as the Bureau of Vital Statistics [Health analytics & Vital Records Section, DHSS] is responsible for checking IDs - or to verify that the wedding took place and was performed in the proper manner. He opined that the bill is smart for the wedding industry in Alaska. He offered to address the previous inquiry regarding Zoom weddings.

CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS welcomed his perspective on the subject of Zoom weddings.

[3:53:57 PM](#)

MR. MULHERN said prior to COVID-19, no states allowed Zoom weddings; however, two states, including New York, currently allow people to marry via Zoom due to COVID-19. He opined that the practice would not last a long, adding that it is not significant to the witness requirement. Returning to Representative Kaufman's question, he said, "No, you could not perform a wedding on Zoom because the witnesses do have to be present at the time of the wedding."

[3:54:44 PM](#)

CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS announced that HB 62 was held over.

[3:55:13 PM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:55 p.m.