

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

March 11, 2024

3:30p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair

Senator Jesse Kiehl

Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair

Senator Jesse Bjorkman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 97

"An Act authorizing lump sum payments for certain teachers as retention and recruitment incentives; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 97

SHORT TITLE: TEACHER RECRUITMENT; LUMP SUM PAYMENT

SPONSOR(S): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

03/08/23	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/08/23	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/24/23	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/24/23	(S)	Scheduled but Not Heard
04/03/23	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
04/03/23	(S)	Heard & Held
04/03/23	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/06/24	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/06/24	(S)	Heard & Held
03/06/24	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/11/24	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

TAMA CARSON, Director

Administrative Services

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented SB 97 fiscal note OMB Component Number 2796.

DEB RIDDLE, Operations Manager

Division of Innovation and Education Excellence

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented SB 97 fiscal note OMB Component Number 2796.

SUSAN RITTER, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 97.

EMILY MOODY, representing self

Cordova, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 97.

SAMUEL ABNEY, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 97.

ANDY HOLLEMAN, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 97.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:30:14 PM](#)

CHAIR LÖKI TOBIN called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Gray-Jackson, Kiehl, and Chair Tobin

SB 97-TEACHER RECRUITMENT; LUMP SUM PAYMENT

[3:31:11 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 97 "An Act authorizing lump sum payments for certain teachers as retention and recruitment incentives; and providing for an effective date."

[3:33:00 PM](#)

TAMA CARSON, Director, Administrative Services, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, introduced herself.

[3:33:08 PM](#)

DEB RIDDLE, Operations Manager, Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, introduced herself.

MS. CARSON stated DEED fiscal note for SB 97, OMB Component Number 2796, dated March 1, 2024, shows the cost associated with the temporary three-year program to make lump sum payments as a retention and recruitment incentive to eligible full-time public-school teachers. It is estimated that SB 97 would require one nonpermanent education associate, Range 17, Step B/C. The position would start in FY 24 to implement the program, develop regulations and applications, and review applications. Ongoing department chargeback costs associated with the positions would be \$16.5 annually. In FY 24, a one-time cost of \$5,000 for the position would be needed to purchase equipment and supplies; as well as a one-time cost of \$6,000 for legal services costs associated with regulation development. The total cost to the department in salary and benefits in FY 25 is \$61.5 million.

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SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON asked for clarification regarding which fiscal note was under discussion.

[3:35:34 PM](#)

MS. CARSON apologized and explained there was a recent misunderstanding in the development of the fiscal note.

[3:35:45 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked if the extra supplemental cost of \$126,000 is to hire the one position.

MS. CARSON replied yes. It also includes the one-time cost for FY 25.

SENATOR KIEHL said there was an earlier version of the fiscal note. He said this version mentions the employer contribution to Teacher Retirement System (TRS) of 12.56 percent. He asked if the administration would change SB 97 to match the fiscal note.

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MS. CARSON stated she would need to follow up and provide an answer to the committee in writing.

[3:37:35 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked if the department plans to fill the position this year.

MS. RIDDLE replied that the state struggles to hire teachers but does not have difficulty hiring education associate positions.

CHAIR TOBIN asked if the position would handle appeals and for an explanation of the appeal process.

MS. RIDDLE stated her belief that the position would take appeals and then receive assistance from higher ranking employees. The process would be laid out in regulation.

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SENATOR KIEHL said the commissioner previously testified that the bonus would occur in two pay outs. He asked what would happen if a teacher failed to complete a year contract.

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MS. CARSON deferred the question to Commissioner Bishop.

[3:39:51 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that was not a consideration in fiscal note OMB 2796; it was based on all teachers completing the year. The fiscal note is the maximum amount needed if all teachers stayed. If some teachers did not stay, there would be remaining funds.

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SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON stated the bonus does not apply to classified staff. She asked if there was concern that SB 97 would affect employee morale.

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MS. RIDDLE deferred the question to Commissioner Bishop.

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COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied morale is always a concern. However, the focus of SB 97 was to make teaching in Alaska more competitive with other states. SB 97 would allow districts to continue their own work to incentivize employees. She noted that in the past incentives were given to staff but not teachers. She opined that if the program works other avenues might become available to increase the salaries of other educational professions statewide.

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CHAIR TOBIN asked if the administration expects districts to match the lump sum amount for classified staff.

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COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied there is variance among teacher and classified staff salaries. The state does not have an expectation for districts. Districts understand the local market best.

[3:43:00 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN stated that from previous testimony the administration would like analysis done by a third party to determine the effectiveness of the program. She stated her understanding that the cost of the analysis is not included in the fiscal note. She asked if the administration plans to analysis data from the three-year program.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied that the administration plans to analyze the program. She said the department has current contracts with Region 16 and Education Northwest that it can engage with to do surveys and studies.

CHAIR TOBIN asked if the administration anticipates handling the analysis using existing contracts.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP replied yes.

[3:45:32 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced public testimony on SB 97.

[3:45:47 PM](#)

SUSAN RITTER, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 97. She gave a brief work history as a teacher and stated that SB 97 targets specific individuals rather than all school employees. She said research shows that bonuses do not retain teachers long-term. She explained that bonuses might give teachers a short-term incentive, but many still leave for states with pensions. She suggested that contacting teachers about paying off their debt might be a more effective retention strategy. She emphasized that SB 97 could create division among educators and support staff. She argued that teachers need defined benefits and an increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA) for meaningful improvement.

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EMILY MOODY, representing self, Cordova, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 97. She said that the only way to retain teachers in Alaska is to provide a defined benefit plan. She described the proposed three-year bonus as an expensive band-aid that will not effectively retain teachers. She argued that teachers are likely to leave after three years, despite the bonus they receive. Alaska needs a long-term solution.

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SAMUEL ABNEY, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 97. He stated that it is easy to determine who would benefit from the SB 97, specifying that certified teachers completing a year of work would receive a bonus of \$5,000, \$10,000, or \$15,000. He acknowledged that no perfect solution exists for incentivizing teacher recruitment and retention. He emphasized the shortage of students becoming teachers, leading to reliance on foreign educators. He argued that any funds available from a Republican governor should be accepted, referencing President Obama's comment that "you can't make the possible the enemy of the perfect." He disagreed with claims that bonuses would create animosity among school staff.

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ANDY HOLLEMAN, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 97. He suggested that if the state has funds for a bonus incentivization experiment, it should conduct different trials across districts to determine the most effective plan, rather than relying on a single approach. He expressed concern that SB 97 politicizes teachers' salaries in Alaska, as it only provides bonuses for three years without guaranteeing future district funding if the program succeeds. He noted the uncertainty regarding what future governors might do, regardless of outcomes. He added that the politicization of education is problematic and that teachers should focus on their classrooms rather than lobbying. He urged for local control, smaller class sizes, and additional resources like aides to support effective teaching.

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CHAIR TOBIN closed public testimony on SB 97.

[3:56:18 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobi adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 3:56 p.m.