

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

May 3, 2024

3:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
Senator Jesse Kiehl  
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 266

"An Act relating to standards-based assessments; relating to correspondence study programs; relating to student fund accounts for correspondence study programs; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 266

SHORT TITLE: CORRESPONDENCE STUDY PROG; STUDENT ACCTS

SPONSOR(S): EDUCATION

04/26/24	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/26/24	(S)	EDC
04/29/24	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
04/29/24	(S)	Heard & Held
04/29/24	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
05/01/24	(S)	FIN REFERRAL ADDED AFTER EDC
05/01/24	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
05/01/24	(S)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
05/03/24	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

**WITNESS REGISTER**

LARRY SLONE, representing self  
Homer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 266.

DAVID MORRISON, representing self  
Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

MARIA MICHALOSKI, representing self  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

KATHERINE ARNDT, representing self  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

MELINDA DEGNAN, representing self  
North Pole, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

KATE GAPPERT, representing self  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

DEB MACKIE, Assistant Director  
IDEA Homeschool  
Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

CHRISTY MONTERO, representing self  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

CHERIE TAYLOR, representing self  
Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

AMANDA WRAITH, representing self  
Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

EMILY MOODY, representing self  
Cordova, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified with concerns on SB 266.

CLAY ARNOLD, representing self  
Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

SUSANNE ALDRIDGE, representing self  
Kenai, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

ANDY HOLLEMAN, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 266.

KATHY DEGNAN, representing self  
Fairbanks, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

LEEANN SHOWELL, representing self  
North Pole, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

KASIE KRAGE, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

BLAINE BRONSON, representing self  
Fairbanks, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

MARCILLA JAVIER, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified with concerns.

ARIANA ANDERSON, representing self  
Juneau, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

JACINTHA MEZZETTI, representing self  
Eagle River, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified with concerns on SB 266.

NICOLE AUSTIN, representing self  
North Pole, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

BRIAN ROZELL, Director  
CyberLynx Correspondence School,  
Nenana City School District  
Nenana, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified with concerns on SB 266.

STEPHANIE FORESTER, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

AMBER CUNNINGHAM, representing self

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 266.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:30:39 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, Stevens, and Chair Tobin. Senator Bjorkman arrived thereafter.

#### **SB 266-CORRESPONDENCE STUDY PROG; STUDENT ACCTS**

[3:31:34 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 266 "An Act relating to standards-based assessments; relating to correspondence study programs; relating to student fund accounts for correspondence study programs; and providing for an effective date."

[3:33:22 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN stated this was the second hearing on SB 266. During the first hearing public testimony was opened. The committee will continue hearing public testimony today. She stated SB 266 is based off a regulatory package that was propagated by the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) in 2008. It was in effect in 2014.

[3:33:52 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN stated she drafted SB 266 without assistance. If SB 266 looks like other legislation it is because it was based on 2008 regulations, which was the most recent example of a constitutionally sound correspondence allotment program. She said that people have concerns about stipulations that are outlined in SB 266. The stipulations come from the 2008 regulatory package, that at the time were considered amiable under the constitution. She referenced SB 266, page 3, line 30 and noted that while there are limitations on reimbursement for family travel, there is a stipulation that DEED, the school board, or a district superintendent could approve it. There is also a stipulation that costs associated with memberships for sports or access to recreation are deductible when included in the student's individual learning plan. SB 266 on page 4, line 24, provides flexibility by allowing a chief school

administrator to identify items under a student's plan that may exceed what is believed to be approved by the individual learning plan.

[3:36:05 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN joined the meeting.

CHAIR TOBIN said parents can use the allotment to purchase materials, resources, and curricula that are approved by the school district or DEED, including private tutoring. SB 266 includes accountability reporting necessary for providing oversight and input. It also contains a requirement for student-based assessments to acquire accountability data. She clarified that the state has multiple statewide assessments, including the AK STAR and MAPS testing, which are not high stakes tests but rather tools used to determine whether students are learning content standards. She referenced the Moore consent decree directing the legislature to assess students to ensure they are receiving appropriate instruction in content standards. Data from the assessments allows the legislature to appropriately allocate funds to underfunded areas thereby supporting the state's constitutionally mandated public education systems.

[3:38:00 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said he appreciated the discussion on the issues addressed in SB 266. He opined that there has been misunderstanding regarding the work that has been done, but the goal is to make sure Alaska's children get educated and the state's money is spent appropriately.

[3:38:21 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN opened public testimony on SB 266.

[3:38:44 PM](#)

LARRY SLONE, representing self, Homer, Alaska, testified in support of SB 266 stating it helps clarify a central political and social issue regarding the interpretation of the First Amendment's "wall of separation" between church and state. He said the statute has provided a valuable vehicle for public funding of private and religious schools for ten years. He opined that it is now under assault by public school funding activists who, in the Alexander lawsuit, would cut off their nose to spite their face regarding Alaska's educational systems. It is important that their objective of shutting down public funding be declared official policy so the statute can be harmonized with the Alaska State Constitution's prohibition against such public funding. At issue are efforts by activists

to empower government—not to establish a government-mandated Church of America—but to inappropriately flip the First Amendment on its head and indiscriminately use government decrees to condition Alaskans. Henceforth, Christian family values would no longer play a role in the education of the Nation's children, eliminating the need for competing private schools. Alaskans face a stark choice: either shut down public funding as mandated by the Constitution or amend the State Constitution to allow freedom of expression, religious or otherwise, in conformity with Supreme Court and other rulings.

[3:41:12 PM](#)

DAVID MORRISON, representing self, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. He stated that many homeschoolers avoid public schools because they fail to meet children's needs, parents disagree with the curriculum, or the schools lack desired educational opportunities. He argued that SB 266 would severely limit parents' ability to provide individualized education tailored to their children's and families' needs, often at a lower cost to the state than public schooling. He opposed forcing all families and students to conform to a system that does not serve everyone effectively. He added that if the intent was solely to address constitutional issues with correspondence schooling, SB 266 should limit its focus to that matter.

[3:42:21 PM](#)

MARIA MICHALOSKI, representing self, Palmer, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She thanked Senator Tobin for clarifying that private tutoring is allowed and expressed appreciation for this flexibility. She noted that SB 266 seemed to suggest such tutoring required certified teachers employed by the school district but was relieved to learn this was not the case, as it would demand additional funding and burden already busy teachers. She said her primary concern with SB 266 was the cancellation of the rollover fund. She explained that since her son enrolled in 2015, she has saved \$15,000 from his allotment for future higher education, such as college or pilot training, instead of spending it on other classes or tutoring. She expressed frustration that SB 266 would redirect this money to the school district, which she finds unfair, and urged consideration of amendments to align SB 266 more closely with HB 400.

[3:44:04 PM](#)

KATHERINE ARNDT, representing self, Palmer, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She said she chose to homeschool her

children because her oldest son struggled with severe ADHD and autistic tendencies, and attending a brick-and-mortar school would not serve his needs or benefit others. She explained that schools are not designed to provide the one-on-one time her son requires, and the allotment received through IDEA (Interior Distance Education of Alaska) has been invaluable. Rather than providing unrestricted funds, the allotment enabled her to tailor her children's curriculum, fund field trips exploring Alaska's wildlife and history, and support unique activities like learning Scottish bagpipes and drums. The allotment also covered books that helped her older children achieve high school-level reading skills by ages 9 and 10. She noted her experience is not unique, citing Alaska charter schools' high national rankings in mathematics and reading. She expressed concern that SB 266 jeopardizes educational opportunities for homeschool students, describing it as a setback for families striving to provide quality education. She criticized SB 266 for failing to distinguish between private schools and private businesses, requiring certified teachers or staff for tutoring and classes, mandating testing, and eliminating allotment rollovers. She added that SB 266 might restrict access to cultural and educational sites like the Anchorage Museum.

[3:46:14 PM](#)

MELINDA DEGNAN, representing self, North Pole, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She expressed concern about mandatory state testing, stating it does not benefit students and that there are better ways to measure growth, success, and appropriate fund use. She urged a focus on these alternatives to preserve educational freedom. She opposed eliminating allotment rollover, arguing it would not save money but instead prompt parents to spend funds hastily, undermining their ability to save for long-term goals like dual enrollment in college during high school. She emphasized the harm this would cause to students who have been saving for years to invest in their futures. She also highlighted the potential negative impact of stricter spending rules on remote students, who rely on resources such as physical education equipment, and urged careful consideration of their unique needs.

[3:47:45 PM](#)

KATE GAPPERT, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She highlighted the availability of quality standardized tests through the free market, offering faster and more flexible results for parents. She questioned whether Alaska applies retaliatory measures for test scores and if such policies affect all schools equally. She emphasized that

rollover funds are essential for families saving for advanced courses like AP and college classes, which motivate students and parents. She asked whether restricted use would affect the ability of correspondence schools to have clubs and sports. She asked for clarification on whether private tutoring could be used for the arts but not core subjects, arguing this would contradict the state's efforts to improve education. She also questioned the financial impact on small businesses and the fairness of applying restrictions solely to correspondence schools, urging clarity and reconsideration of limits SB 266 places on educational choices.

[3:50:21 PM](#)

DEB MACKIE, Assistant Director, IDEA Homeschool, Soldotna, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266 on behalf of IDEA. She stated she has been involved in homeschooling for over 30 years and joined Interior Distance Education of Alaska (IDEA) at its inception after independently homeschooling her oldest child. She shared that her children, educated through individualized homeschooling, pursued secondary education, and earned master's degrees, becoming a successful businesswoman and a specialized nurse and educator, respectively, while contributing meaningfully to their communities. She emphasized that assessments, like all aspects of education, should remain a parental choice. She criticized SB 266 for limiting parental choice, individual learning plans, and spending flexibility compared to brick-and-mortar schools. She urged the committee to align SB 266 with CSHB 400, which addresses constitutional concerns without undermining public school choice for homeschooling families.

[3:53:01 PM](#)

CHRISTY MONTERO, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She stated that she is that parent of two children that homeschool. She expressed concern about SB 266 and its impact on educational flexibility and funding. She emphasized that many students, including those with special needs, do not thrive in traditional schools, and requiring certified educators or resources would limit opportunities for these children. She highlighted the importance of rollover funds, noting that many families rely on these savings to plan for their children's future education. She criticized SB 266 for appearing to address public school funding shortfalls at the expense of homeschool families, which she argued is unfair. She noted that homeschool families are self-reliant and resourceful and pointed out the challenges of finding enough certified teachers to meet the proposed requirements. She

advocated for meeting in the middle and respecting families' right to choose the educational approach that best fits their children's needs, comparing educational choice to medical decision-making. She urged legislators to consider collaborative solutions that support all students and families, rather than further dividing communities, and emphasized the importance of respecting individual needs while managing resources flexibly.

[3:56:01 PM](#)

CHERIE TAYLOR, representing self, Soldotna, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She expressed deep concern about its impact on homeschooling families across the state. She identified three key issues with SB 266: the removal of parents' right to opt out of testing, which she argued should remain a parental choice; significant allotment restrictions that prohibit items like PE equipment, educational furniture, and in-state travel, creating hardships for families and economic losses for vendors; and the elimination of allotment carryovers, which families rely on to cover more expensive materials and classes as children grow older. She said she strongly supports CSHB 400, version U, stating it offers continuity and minimizes disruption for homeschool correspondence students, including her son.

[3:57:37 PM](#)

AMANDA WRAITH, representing self, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She urged alignment of SB 266 with CSHB 400, describing the latter as a better alternative. She opposed SB 266 for unnecessary mandates. She specifically called for the removal of mandatory testing requirements, noting that state-provided test results arrive too late, often in January or February, making them ineffective for timely decision-making. She emphasized that better assessment options exist for evaluating children and strongly discouraged further pursuit of SB 266.

[3:58:50 PM](#)

EMILY MOODY, representing self, Cordova, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 266. She stated does not want any public money used for religious schools, emphasizing the need to close any loopholes because it is unconstitutional. She acknowledged concerns about assessment requirements for homeschool and correspondence schools and suggested that if those policies are changed, alternative assessments should also be considered for public schools facing similar challenges, as they too rely on public funding.

4:00:14 PM

CLAY ARNOLD, representing self, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. He shared that his child is excelling in a correspondence school, completing kindergarten while advancing to second-grade math due to the tailored education –something not possible in a neighborhood school. He explained that he and his family have invested significant time researching curricula and methodologies that fit his child's needs, options that SB 266 would eliminate. He highlighted concerns about the wording of SB 266, noting that while Senator Tobin stated textbooks would still be allowed, the language in the bill does not clearly reflect that intent. He urged clarity in the legislation to avoid misinterpretation, citing terms like "private educational institutions" as ambiguous. He emphasized that parents, not the Department, know their children best and are best equipped to evaluate their needs. He criticized mandatory testing, arguing it has no educational benefit for children since results are delayed for nearly a year and serve only the state. He underscored the importance of preserving parental choice, a hallmark of Alaska, and strongly opposed SB 266 for undermining those rights.

CHAIR TOBIN referenced SB 266, page 3, lines 3 - 13.

4:02:19 PM

SUSANNE ALDRIDGE, representing self, Kenai, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She said she is a mother of three children and has been a homeschool correspondence educator for five years. She works with multiple community organizations serving children and homeschooling youth and is a member of IDEA's parental advisory committee. She described widespread concern and uncertainty among homeschool families regarding proposed allotment changes in SB 266, which she said threaten the homeschooling model and children's right to an unencumbered education. She argued that state assessments are not reliable indicators of a child's aptitude, as factors like test anxiety and cognitive maturity greatly influence results, and such assessments should not determine allotment allowances. She emphasized that restrictions on allotment spending in SB 266 would negatively affect all 22,000 Alaskan homeschool children and families. Alaska is a state with limited access to resources like physical education equipment and facilities, which are vital for mental and physical health during long, harsh winters. She expressed confidence in finding an amicable, constitutionally compliant solution and voiced support for CSHB 400, which she said offers a more balanced and flexible approach

to homeschool correspondence programs while respecting the state constitution.

[4:03:59 PM](#)

ANDY HOLLEMAN, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 266. He said he is a retired educator, founder of a charter correspondence school, and member of the Anchorage School District (ASD) board. He thanked the committee for introducing SB 266, which he described as clear, focused, and likely to pass constitutional review. He noted that on Monday, ASD paused reimbursements and expenditures due to concerns about the legal basis for continuation. Due to the recent court ruling the most immediate issues were alleviated a little. However, he stressed the need for solid constitutional rules to guide fall planning for correspondence programs and to assist families in making decisions. He opined that SB 266 provides clear guidelines to ensure compliance with the Constitution and urged its passage during this legislative session to allow for timely implementation. He encouraged the committee to expedite SB 266 and expressed appreciation for the work of the committee members.

[4:05:24 PM](#)

KATHY DEGNAN, grandma of homeschool students, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She said she is a grandmother of homeschooled children and the wife of an educator. She shared concerns that public schools may not meet the unique needs of children like her grandchildren, who are excelling in their current homeschool environment but would be placed in a backroom corner in public school. She emphasized that parents understand their children's needs better than the educational system, which, while valuable, cannot address every child's individual requirements. She stressed the importance of maintaining the rollover allotment, allowing families to save for college credits, purchase PE equipment for harsh winters, and support unique educational experiences like farm tours and museum visits, which she described as critical to raising well-rounded, socially adept children. She praised HB 400 as a viable alternative and urged its consideration, highlighting its support for parental rights and flexibility in education. She concluded by reaffirming her belief that parents are best equipped to make decisions for their children and asked legislators to reject SB 266 in favor of more inclusive solutions.

[4:07:38 PM](#)

LEEANN SHOWELL, representing self, North Pole, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She expressed that her primary concern about SB 266 was mandated state testing, stating it does not adequately represent the broad range of material her children are learning or their success in mastering it. She warned that spending restrictions in SB 266 would negatively impact both homeschooling families and Alaska's local economy, including many businesses. She urged legislators to educate themselves on what homeschooling truly entails, emphasizing the diverse materials and experiences families provide under current statutes. She highlighted that removing funding for PE equipment and family passes could prevent her family from safely engaging in outdoor activities during Alaska's long winters. She asked lawmakers to consider the harmful effects of the proposed changes on her family and others homeschooling through correspondence schools. She strongly advocated for amendments to SB 266 and suggested HB 400 as a better alternative, offering continuity and better addressing the needs of homeschooling families.

[4:09:47 PM](#)

KASIE KRAGE, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She expressed her passion for protecting Alaska's freedoms, particularly the right to homeschool in ways that best suit families. She emphasized Alaska's uniqueness in valuing independence and the ability to choose how children learn. She argued that SB 266 threatens these freedoms by limiting spending options previously allowed, which she believes undermines Alaska's character and values. She urged the committee to oppose SB 266, advocating for the preservation of educational freedom and the ability for families to homeschool according to their needs.

[4:11:20 PM](#)

BLAINE BRONSON, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. He expressed concern over the removal of rollover funds, noting that he and his wife have saved over \$20,000 for their children's future education, which now seems at risk. He explained that losing this option limits opportunities for older children to access higher education. He also criticized the restrictions on PE and music spending, highlighting the importance of indoor activities during Alaska's harsh winters and drawing comparisons to public school programs that fund activities like skiing, rentals, and passes, which he believes should be equally available to homeschool families. He said he opposes the mandatory testing requirements, explaining that correspondence schooling already involves frequent

assessments through quizzes, tests, and submitted samples, which provide a clear picture of students' performance and needs. He praised the support and dedication of the CyberLynx program staff and teachers, expressing gratitude for their efforts in ensuring a successful homeschooling experience. He urged consideration of the unique needs of homeschool families and voiced strong opposition to SB 266.

[4:13:37 PM](#)

MARCILLA JAVIER, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 266. She said she is a grandmother with decades of experience in publicly funded correspondence programs since 1998. She recounted her homeschooling experience, including nine years of independent homeschooling followed by three years in a correspondence school, and highlighted her commitment to building respectful relationships between public schools and parents customizing education. While appreciating the effort behind SB 266, she expressed concern that there is insufficient time to address widespread opposition through the legislative process. She urged lawmakers to collaborate with the House and restart discussions using CSHB 400, version U, which she believes places responsibility in the right hands with the State Department of Education and Early Development. She advocated for preserving allotment carryover to prevent wasteful spending and maintaining parents' rights to opt out of testing. She suggested revisiting additional changes after state elections if the public demands it because correspondence schools need to know that they can move forward with reenrollment.

[4:16:23 PM](#)

ARIANA ANDERSON, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She highlighted potential impact of SB 266 on educational opportunities and equity. She shared that as a veterinarian actively contributing to her community through emergency services and clinic relief, her ability to homeschool depends on outsourcing parts of her children's education. She noted that many working parents similarly rely on correspondence programs to balance careers and homeschooling. She expressed alarm over the provision prohibiting the use of allotments for services or materials provided by private or religious educational institutions. She called this discriminatory, pointing out that public schools routinely use private vendors for materials and services. She emphasized that prohibiting private resources would eliminate valuable activities like PE, music, and online Spanish classes taught by native speakers—resources critical to her children's academic and scheduling

needs. She stated that her family rarely uses traditional textbooks. The private resources she uses would be prohibited because they come from private institutions, yet public schools can use private resources, tutors, and curricula. She opined that it is the children, not the institutions, which receive the primary benefit from utilizing private institutions. Since the wording of who receives primary benefit is what the court ruled on, clarification either in the constitution or in statute is needed. She stated that the existing process already ensures religious materials and services are excluded from allotment reimbursement. She stated there are many other concerns for educational freedoms in SB 266, including inequities between public schools and correspondence students. She called for a better solution to preserve diverse educational opportunities for homeschoolers.

4:18:45 PM

JACINTHA MEZZETTI, representing self, Eagle River, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 266. She expressed gratitude for the committee's work on SB 266 but urged them to review HB 400 and reconcile language changes to align SB 266 with the successful practices taking place Alaska's correspondence programs. She highlighted the historical continuity and quality of education these programs have provided, which she believes are now at risk. She emphasized the importance of allotment carryover, which enables disadvantaged families to make impactful educational choices and allows students to develop essential skills for trade school, advanced academic study, or direct entry into the workforce. She noted that many high school students have graduated with associate degrees or certifications because of these opportunities. She questioned the mandatory state testing requirement, citing its punitive effect on educational goals and student self-esteem in some families. She also criticized spending restrictions as unnecessarily punitive, particularly harming students in rural and remote areas. She encouraged the committee to reconsider these elements to preserve the benefits of correspondence programs for all students.

4:21:27 PM

NICOLE AUSTIN, representing self, North Pole, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She stated she holds a Bachelor's in Family Studies and Early Childhood Education from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and homeschools her four sons. She argued that SB 266 limits her ability to cultivate lifelong learners who can become independent, successful community members and pursue higher education. She highlighted the need

for PE equipment and gym access to support her children's physical needs, especially given the extreme winter conditions in the interior, where her four active boys live. She shared that her father, a professor at UAF initially opposed homeschooling but changed his perspective after observing the confidence and engagement of homeschool students during a UAF field trip. She emphasized that homeschooling produces articulate, curious learners who positively contribute to society. She urged legislators to recognize these benefits, expressed strong opposition to SB 266, and voiced support for CSHB 400, version U.

[4:23:33 PM](#)

BRIAN ROZELL, Director, CyberLynx Correspondence School, Nenana City School District, Nenana, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 266. He said he is representing his district of the CyberLynx homeschool program but is also advocating for all other state correspondence programs, and the more than 22,000 enrolled students and their families. He emphasized the importance of rollover allotment funds, noting that many families budget carefully, save for future expenses, and plan for high school students to take university classes. Rollover funds prevent the year-end scramble to spend allotments, reducing unnecessary and wasteful spending. He criticized the repeal of parental authority to withdraw children from state testing, arguing it is hugely unpopular and would drive families to homeschool independently. He noted that mandating participation in state assessments, without allowing alternatives, would discourage families from engaging in the program, undermining the goal of increasing participation. He also highlighted the inequity in prohibiting PE equipment purchases, pointing out that brick-and-mortar schools have access to well-equipped gymnasiums while homeschool families would be denied comparable resources. He thanked the committee for their work and urged amendments to SB 266 to address these issues while continuing to support homeschool families.

[4:26:00 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked how long the CyberLynx program has existed.

MR. ROZELL replied since 1997.

[4:26:17 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN stated that the exemption to withdraw from assessment became allowable in 2016. She asked what CyberLynx did prior to the exemption to ensure compliance with statewide assessments.

[4:26:32 PM](#)

MR. ROZELL replied that, if he remembers correctly, the State of Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) regulations required, without exception, all students enrolled in a correspondence program to participate in the assessment. Families who did not participate in testing had their allotments frozen and were barred from reenrollment the following year.

[4:27:04 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked if the CyberLynx program participates in Alaska middle college, a program that allows public school students to take courses at universities.

MR. ROZELL replied that to his knowledge, CyberLynx students do not have access to that program but would welcome the opportunity.

[4:27:44 PM](#)

STEPHANIE FORESTER, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She expressed strong support for parents' right to refuse testing for their children, stating that while she has always chosen to have her daughter tested, she believes opting out should remain a parental choice. She emphasized the importance of allotment carryover for her family, noting that it has been used to support her children's education, including one who graduated in 2017, another who attended Middle College and is now at the University of Alaska. She stated her plans to use carryover funds for her 10th-grade homeschool student to take classes university classes and a driver education course. She criticized the spending restrictions in SB 266 as unnecessarily strict and punitive, particularly for students in rural areas. She voiced support for HB 400, which retains allotment carryover and allows the State Board of Education to align statutes with the Constitution. She urged amendments to SB 266 to make it more like HB 400.

[4:29:35 PM](#)

AMBER CUNNINGHAM, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 266. She said she is a parent of two Raven correspondence graduates and a current high school junior. She has 15 years of experience in correspondence programs and works for Home Bridge in Juneau. She advocated for allowing student funds to be used for private tutors and individually taught classes, sharing her own experience teaching science classes for K-8 students over nine years, often with a waiting list. She explained that her classes adhered to Alaska State Standards and

were approved by certified teachers, despite her not holding a teaching degree, demonstrating that non-traditional educators can effectively support students. She also highlighted her role as a robotics coach for 13 years, noting that such opportunities would be restricted under SB 266, which would harm students, particularly those academically deficient, who rely on correspondence schools to graduate. She acknowledged that standardized testing is connected to federal funding but argued that tests like the ACT and SAT are no longer viewed as accurate measures of student success, citing universities' declining reliance on them.

[4:32:17 PM](#)

At ease

[4:33:51 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN reconvened the meeting.

[4:34:29 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN held public testimony open and held SB 266 in committee.

[4:35:17 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 4:35 p.m.