

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 17, 2025

3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Mike Cronk

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): ALASKA'S PER PUPIL SPENDING IN CONTEXT

- HEARD

SENATE BILL NO. 6

"An Act requiring education in the history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 6

SHORT TITLE: ASIAN AMERICAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER PROGRAM

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) GRAY-JACKSON

01/10/25	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/17/25	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

DAYNA JEAN DEFEO, Director
Center for Alaska Education Policy Research
Institute of Social and Economic Research
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an ISER Update on Alaska's Per Pupil Spending in Context.

MATTHEW BERMAN, Professor of Economics
Institute of Social and Economic Research
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on the ISER Update on Alaska's Per Pupil Spending in Context.

SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON, District G
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 6.

ZANDER KOTLAROV, Staff
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
Alaska State Legislature

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the sectional analysis for SB 6.

KELLY MANNING, Deputy Director
Innovation and Education Excellence
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Reviewed the fiscal note for SB 6.

SHAYNE NUESCA, Co-Director
Make Us Visible Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 6.

KAYE ROLDAN, Co-Director
Make Us Visible Alaska
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 6.

HANNAH REBADULLA, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 6.

LUCENA DELCASTILLO, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 6.

EDRIC CARILLO, Vice President
Filipino Community of Alaska
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 6.

TAMMALIVIS, SALANOA
Director Assistant
Polynesian Association of Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 6.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:30:21 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the called to order were Senators Kiehl, Stevens, Cronk, and Chair Tobin. Senator Bjorkman arrived thereafter.

PRESENTATION(S) :

ISER UPDATE ON ALASKA'S PER PUPIL SPENDING IN CONTEXT

[3:31:59 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the presentation ISER Update on Alaska's Per Pupil Spending in Context. The presentation is updates from 2022 and 2023.

[3:33:21 PM](#)

At ease.

[3:36:16 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN reconvened the meeting.

[3:37:43 PM](#)

DAYNA JEAN DEFEO, Director, Center for Alaska Education Policy Research, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Anchorage, Alaska, presented an ISER Update on Alaska's Per Pupil Spending in Context. She introduced herself and said she is also an Associate Professor of Education Policy.

[3:37:57 PM](#)

MATTHEW BERMAN, Professor of Economics, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Anchorage, Alaska, answered questions on the ISER Update on Alaska's Per Pupil Spending in Context. He introduced himself.

[3:38:13 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO stated that she and her colleague were invited to speak about a report originally written in 2019 and updated in 2022. She noted that the study has been widely shared across the legislature, including with committees, staffers, and new

legislators. She emphasized that they group brought updated numbers and additional context.

[3:38:47 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 2, Today's Presentation, and stated the presentation is structured around five questions that they would address sequentially. She noted that they would provide context for the calculations and conclude with identified areas of opportunity:

[Original punctuation provided.]

5 questions

- How much does Alaska spend on public education, and how does that compare to other states?
- What do we know about Alaska's 2023 spending?
- Where does the money come from?
- Where does the money go?
- How does inflation factor in?

Context & recommendations

- Putting comparisons into perspective
- Looking ahead

[3:39:11 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 3, Our Key Findings:

- After adjusting for geographic costs, Alaska's per pupil spending is 15% below the national average, and has fallen consistently since 2017.
- Since 2017, the proportion of Alaska's per-pupil spending coming from federal and local sources has increased, while state support has decreased.
- Alaska's education investments are not keeping up with inflation.

[3:40:08 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked whether the presenters would explain what geographic costs include later in the presentation. He also requested a comparison of the 15 percent gap in per-pupil spending from 2017 to the current percentage. Additionally, he asked for clarification on the current components of geographic costs, including items such as fuel, electricity, and maintenance.

[3:40:41 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO asked for the question to be repeated.

[3:41:01 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS apologized for any lack of clarity and expressed interest in a detailed explanation of geographic costs. He asked whether those costs include fuel, electricity, maintenance, teacher hiring, and housing. He also requested the current percentage difference in per-pupil spending compared to the national average, noting that the presenters stated it has declined since 2017. He concluded by saying they might wait to see if the presentation addresses these points.

[3:41:46 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO stated that the presentation would address, or at least begin to address, the questions raised. Due to poor audio, she requested questions occur after the presentation.

[3:42:38 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 4 and stated her belief that answers to the question posed Senator Stevens will be answered by discussion of the first of the five questions outlined in the presentation, "How much does Alaska spend on public education, and how does that compare to other states?" She addressed a common perception that Alaska has high per-pupil spending and low student outcomes, clarifying that the data presented are standardized national figures reported by all states with a time lag. The data used for the presentation reflect spending during the 2021-2022 academic year, with limited 2023 data included where available.

[3:43:24 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 5, How much does Alaska pay:

[Original punctuation provided.]

How much does Alaska pay?

Raw dollars: Average per-pupil K-12 spending, 2021-2022

Nation

\$15,633

Alaska

\$20,191

- 8th highest in nation 29 percentage higher than national average
- Probably 10th in 2023
 - 41 states (including Alaska) have reported
 - 2 states moved ahead of Alaska
Rhode Island & Delaware

MS. DEFEO explained that the spending figures come from the U.S. Census Bureau's Annual Survey of School System Finances. Although Alaska-specific data from the Alaska Association of School Business Officials are more detailed for local analysis, national comparisons require uniform sources, making the Census data more appropriate. In 2022, Alaska's per-pupil spending was \$20,191—20 percent higher than the national average of \$15,633—ranking Alaska 8th highest in the nation. In 2019, Alaska's spending was 39 percent higher and ranked 6th; in 2017, it was 46 percent higher. She attributed the narrowing gap to other states increasing their education investments faster than Alaska. Preliminary 2023 data indicate that Alaska now ranks 10th, as two additional states have surpassed it.

[3:44:56 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 6, Alaska's per-pupil spending, 2017 - 2022, a visual showing that Alaska's spending in raw dollars is approaching the national average. She stressed the need to adjust for Alaska's higher cost of living, especially in remote rural communities, to make fair comparisons:

- 2017 - Alaska raw dollars exceeded the national average by 46 percent
- 2019 - Alaska raw dollars exceeded the national average by 39 percent
- 2022 - Alaska raw dollars exceeded the national average by 29 percent

[3:45:30 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slides 7 and 9. She stated slide 7 shows the first adjustment that the study made:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Step 1: Statewide adjustment

Alaska's average

Includes costs for different places & programs

Statewide adjustment

Cost of goods varies by place

Adjust costs with differentials relative to Anchorage

Raw dollars \$20,191

Adjust Alaska to Anchorage: \$16,784

MS. DEFEO described the first adjustment: recalculating per-pupil spending relative to Anchorage using the geographic cost differential from the state's foundation funding formula, weighted by district average daily membership. She moved to slide 9, a map of Alaska, and said that many districts, particularly those in teal, have cost differentials at least 1.5 times higher than Anchorage. She commented that the map visually makes it easy to see not just how many communities are greater than 1.5 but also the magnitude.

[3:46:50 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 8, Alaska's per-pupil spending, adjusted to Anchorage 2017-2022:

2017 - Alaska raw dollars exceeded the national average by 46 percent

Alaska, adjusted to Anchorage exceeded the national average by 22 percent

2019 - Alaska raw dollars exceeded the national average by 39 percent

Alaska, adjusted to Anchorage exceeded the national average by 16 percent

2022 - Alaska raw dollars exceeded the national average by 29 percent

Alaska, adjusted to Anchorage exceeded the national average by 7 percent

MS. DEFEO stated that, after applying the Anchorage adjustment, Alaska's per-pupil spending was only 7 percent above the national average compared to 22 percent higher than the national average in 2017.

[3:47:25 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 10, Step 2: National Adjustment, and stated that because Anchorage itself has higher costs than most

U.S. regions, a second adjustment was applied using a widely accepted cost-of-living index from the Council for Community and Economic Research:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Step 2: National adjustment

Alaska's average

- Includes costs for different places & programs

Statewide adjustment

- Cost of goods varies by place
- Adjust costs with differentials relative to Anchorage

National adjustment

- Cost of living in Anchorage is higher than other places in the US

Raw dollars \$20,191

Adjust Alaska to Anchorage \$16,784

Adjust Anchorage to national average: \$13,247

[3:47:54 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 11, Alaska's per-pupil spending, adjusted to Anchorage and the US average, 2017-2022:

- 2017 - Alaska raw dollars exceeded the national average by 46 percent
 - Alaska, adjusted to Anchorage 22 percent
 - Alaska, adjusted to US average -2 percent
- 2019 - Alaska raw dollars exceeded the national average by 39 percent
 - Alaska, adjusted to Anchorage 16 percent
 - Alaska, adjusted to US average -7
- 2022 - Alaska raw dollars exceeded the national average by 29 percent
 - Alaska, adjusted to Anchorage 7 percent
 - Alaska, adjusted to US average -15 percent

MS. DEFEO concluded that, after adjusting for both intra-state and national cost differentials, Alaska's per-pupil spending has been below the national average since 2017 and is now 15 percent lower. She emphasized that the gap is growing and that the

relative decline becomes more pronounced when accounting for the true cost of delivering education in Alaska.

[3:48:48 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 12 - 14, and said the question being addressed is: What Do We Know About Alaska's 2023 spending. She noted that the graph on slide 14 is an enlarged copy of slide 13 to better show Alaska's data. She clarified that 41 states, including Alaska, have reported 2023 per-pupil spending data, but a national average cannot yet be calculated until all states report. However, she noted the available data is shown on slides 13 and 14.

MS. DEFEO said slides 13 and 14 shows all states ranked by their 2022 spending in yellow bars, with 2023 data represented by red bars for those states that have reported. In every case, red bars are longer, indicating spending increases across all reporting states. She pointed out that top spenders like New York and the District of Columbia have not yet submitted 2023 data.

MS. DEFEO emphasized that Alaska's red and yellow bars are close in length, suggesting only a modest spending increase from 2022 to 2023. She noted that Rhode Island and Delaware, which trailed Alaska in 2022, have now surpassed Alaska in 2023 spending, placing Alaska 10th in the nation for per-pupil spending.

[3:50:23 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slides 15 to address question 3, Where does the money come from and what funding streams make up Alaska's per pupil spending. She emphasized that while state funding—primarily determined by the funding formula and the Base Student Allocation (BSA)—is the largest portion, federal and local sources also contribute significantly.

[3:50:55 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 16, two pie charts showing the distribution of funding sources in Alaska's per-pupil spending for 2017 and 2023. She compared Alaska's funding distribution between 2017 and 2023. In 2023, 55 percent of per-pupil funding came from state general funds, 22 percent from federal sources, and 23 percent from local contributions. In contrast, in 2017, 64 percent came from the state. She noted that the 2023 federal share likely includes residual funds from COVID-era federal relief, which are expected to phase out in 2024, creating potential pressure on the state to fill funding gaps.

MS. DEFEO added that Alaska's funding structure differs from most other states due to lower local contributions, especially in Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAs), which cannot levy local taxes. Conversely, Alaska receives a higher proportion of federal funds, reflecting unique state-level funding dynamics.

[3:52:45 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 17 to address question 4, Where did the money go. She said how Alaska spends its dollars would be compared to the national average.

[3:53:00 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 18 and returned to 2022 data to enable comparison with the U.S. average and presented two pie charts showing how school districts allocate spending across expense categories—one for the national average and one for Alaska.

MS. DEFEO stated that salaries and wages represent the largest share of current spending in both cases. Alaska allocates about 45.5 percent of spending to wages, while other states allocate approximately 54 percent. She clarified that wage figures include all school district staff, though instructional salaries—primarily for teachers—make up the majority.

MS. DEFEO pointed out that Alaska allocates a higher proportion of spending to employee benefits and maintenance compared to other states. She said the next couple of slides provide context.

[3:53:58 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 19, Salaries and Wages: Compared to the national average and adjusted for cost of living, Alaska's teacher salaries are not competitive. She clarified that the bar graphs are specifically for teacher's salaries. She explained that while the earlier pie chart included all school district staff, this slide isolates teacher pay. She referenced previous research conducted with Mr. Berman, in which they adjusted teacher salaries first to Anchorage and then to the U.S. average using the same geographic cost adjustment approach discussed earlier. She reported that in raw 2022 dollars, Alaska's average teacher salary was 11 percent higher than the national average. However, after geographic adjustments, Alaska's teacher salaries were 25 percent below the national average. She concluded that the disparity in adjusted teacher salaries is even more pronounced than the gap in per-pupil spending, though both follow the same pattern.

[3:55:04 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 20,

Employee benefits: Alaska's healthcare costs are highest in nation.

- Alaska offers similar benefits to other states
- Highest benefit cost is health care premiums
Packages and employee costs differ between Alaska districts
- Alaska has highest healthcare costs in US
Not unique to education
Negatively affects private & public sector
- Health care costs are part of overall compensation
Starting with fixed budget, growth rate in healthcare costs puts downward pressure on wage
 - Makes competing for teachers more difficult

MS. DEFEO reiterated that Alaska allocates a higher proportion of education spending to employee benefits compared to other states. She clarified that this does not indicate Alaska offers better benefits, but rather that the state pays more for them. She emphasized that a significant portion of these benefit costs comes from healthcare, noting that Alaska has the highest per capita healthcare costs in the U.S. While this issue affects all sectors of the economy, it directly impacts education budgets. She explained that in a fixed budget environment, high healthcare costs reduce the funds available for wages, making it more difficult for school districts to offer competitive teacher salaries.

[3:55:51 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 21, Operations and maintenance: Energy is expensive and variable.

[Original punctuation provided.]

Costs

Fuel

Costs more in remote places
Costs fluctuate (a lot)

Districts have different capacities to negotiate competitive prices

Electricity

Schools don't benefit from
Power Cost Equalization (PCE)
program

Amount needed

More to heat schools in colder places

Regardless of the number of students in a building, it
must be heated and lit

MS. DEFEO noted that Alaska spends slightly more than other states on maintenance and operations, as shown in the pie chart on Slide 18. She attributed much of this to higher energy costs in operating rural schools. She explained that rural districts face elevated fuel costs and are not eligible for the Power Cost Equalization (PCE) program, which lowers electricity rates for rural households but not for schools. She emphasized that energy costs have two components: the price of energy and the amount needed. She stated that schools, especially in colder regions, require significant fuel to heat buildings and electricity to operate them—expenses that are largely fixed regardless of student enrollment.

[3:56:50 PM](#)

MR. BERMAN clarified that earlier references to spending referred specifically to current spending, which includes instruction, support services, and operations and maintenance. He explained that when discussing revenue sources, the data reflects funding for all school spending—not just current expenditures. This includes capital outlays, such as large school construction or major maintenance projects typically funded through the capital budget and school bond debt reimbursement. He distinguished that funding source data covers total spending, while expenditure data focuses only on current spending. He asked that the original question be repeated.

[3:58:28 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO reminded Mr. Berman of the question. [indiscernible]

[3:58:43 PM](#)

MR. BERMAN noted, as reminded by Ms. DeFeo, that Alaska spends less per student on capital outlays and bond debt reimbursement compared to other states. He explained that in recent years, declining state revenues have led to shrinking operating and capital budgets, which have reduced school spending and funding for school construction and maintenance through the bond debt

reimbursement program. He stated that [this decline in capital spending] is part of the reason why state support, as a percentage of total [education funding], has been decreasing in Alaska relative to the national average.

3:59:44 PM

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 22, question 5, How does inflation factor in. She acknowledged that inflation has been a major topic of discussion and noted that, until this point, the presentation focused on percentage comparisons to the national average, which did not require inflation adjustments. She stated that it is still important to examine inflation directly. Between 2017 and 2022, the U.S. Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by 18.6 percent. She said the presentation would now examine how education spending changed over the same period.

4:00:10 PM

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 23 and described a chart comparing changes in education spending to the U.S. inflation rate. She explained that the thick black center line on the chart represents inflation; states matching inflation appear on the line, those exceeding inflation are to the right with positive percentages, and those falling short appear to the left with negative percentages.

MS. DEFEO stated that the red bars show data from the 41 states that have reported 2023 figures, while the blue bars represent the U.S. average across different time periods. She noted that, on average, both nationally and among reporting states, education spending has grown faster than inflation. However, she highlighted that Alaska, shown in yellow, is positioned to the left of the black line, indicating that its education spending increases have not kept up with inflation during the same period.

4:01:51 PM

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 24-27, Comparing more than dollars - putting comparisons into perspective. She acknowledged the value of comparing Alaska's education spending to other states, particularly to understand national trends and remain competitive in the teacher labor market. However, she emphasized that Alaska's context for delivering education is uniquely challenging and must be considered alongside the numbers:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Alaska

498 public schools
54 districts
131,000 students
\$20,191/student

Vermont
288 public schools
98 districts
84,000 students
\$24,608/student

North Dakota
511 public schools
179 districts
118,000 students
\$15,843/student

Florida
4,230 public schools
76 districts
2.87 million students
\$11,076/student

MS. DEFEO provided three state comparisons to illustrate this point. Vermont, despite its small geographic size, spends more per student than Alaska, has 60 percent as many schools and students, but nearly twice as many school districts. North Dakota spends slightly less than Alaska but has a similar number of schools and students and nearly three times as many districts. Florida, by contrast, spends less in raw dollars and benefits from economies of scale, serving almost 20 times as many students with far less geographic area to cover. She concluded that while high-level comparisons are informative, meaningful evaluation of Alaska's education spending must account for the state's distinct geographic, demographic, and operational realities.

[4:03:29 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO moved to slide 28-29, Areas of opportunity as we look ahead and Concluding thoughts.

[Original punctuation provided.]

Higher costs are real, particularly in remote, rural communities, but are beyond the control of school districts.

- Fuel & electricity
- Healthcare

- “Basket of goods” reality

As state support lags behind inflation, school districts are left with few options to cut besides instructional expenditures.

- This limits our ability to attract and retain qualified teachers.
- This will affect education outcomes.

How much Alaska should spend is a question of education inputs, rather than dollars.

- Opportunity for evidence-based analyses that can help Alaska determine the inputs to the education system.
- Research consider the relationship between inputs and outcomes in a variety of teaching, learning, and community contexts.

MS. DEFEO concluded the presentation by summarizing key findings and highlighting areas of opportunity. She reiterated that, after adjusting for Alaska’s higher operational costs, per-pupil spending has fallen below the national average and has continued to decline relative to other states since 2017. Although the state has increased education spending, those increases have lagged behind inflation, while other states have generally outpaced inflation in their investments. She noted that the expiration of federal COVID-19 relief funds will add pressure on the state to replace lost revenue. She emphasized that high healthcare and operational costs—particularly in remote rural areas—impact school budgets significantly, yet these are largely outside the control of school districts.

[4:04:13 PM](#)

MS. DEFEO explained that the limited flexibility districts do have is often in instructional spending, which is essential to student outcomes. She stressed the need for Alaska to offer competitive teacher salaries in the national labor market to attract and retain qualified educators. She closed by stating that determining how much Alaska *should* spend on education is more a matter of educational inputs than simple dollar comparisons. While the analysis placed Alaska’s spending in a national context, it did not evaluate the relationship between funding levels and student outcomes. She identified an opportunity for future evidence-based research to better understand which investments can most effectively support educational goals in Alaska.

[4:05:47 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN expressed appreciation to the presenters for the update.

[4:06:16 PM](#)

At ease.

^#sb6

SB 6-ASIAN AMERICAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER PROGRAM

[4:07:21 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 6 "An Act requiring education in the history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders."

[4:07:43 PM](#)

SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON, District G, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 6 provided background on the origins of SB 6. She recounted that several years ago, while former Senator Begich was still serving, he hosted Consul General Seo, Eun-ji from Korea in Anchorage. During that visit, the Consul General shared a copy of a bill passed in New Jersey promoting Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) education.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON said that as a New Jersey native she was enthusiastic about bringing a similar effort to Alaska. She explained that although SB 6 was not introduced immediately, she took the initiative to file it last session. The Senate passed it with 19 votes in favor and one senator absent, but it stalled in the House Rules Committee.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON stated she was honored to reintroduce the proposal through SB 6, which seeks to enrich Alaska's public school curriculum by accurately and meaningfully including the history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. She emphasized that these communities have played a significant role in shaping both the state and the nation, yet their stories are often missing from traditional curriculum. She stressed that SB 6 is about more than education—it is about representation and inclusion. She noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, discrimination against Asian communities increased, and SB 6 can help foster understanding and respect by teaching students about the contributions of AAPI communities to Alaska and the country.

[4:10:29 PM](#)

ZANDER KOTLAROV, Staff, Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson, Alaska State Legislature, provided the sectional analysis for SB 6:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**SB 6: Asian American/Pacific Islanders
Program
Sectional Analysis - Version A**

Section 1- Adds a new section to AS 14.30.

Section 14.30.430 Education in history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

(a) Each school district shall establish and provide to K-12 students a program, approved by the department that includes:

- (1) Instruction on AAPI history and contributions in the United States
- (2) Instructional materials that portray AAPI diversity in culture and economics

(b) "School district" is defined as in AS 14.30.350.

[4:11:48 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN stated that she often hears broad terms used for pan-ethnic groups, such as "Black" or "Indigenous," and emphasized the importance of clarity around which subgroups are included within those categories. She asked specifically which sub-communities are included under the definition of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the context of SB 6. She inquired whether groups such as Samoans and Native Hawaiians are part of that definition and expressed interest in having a clearer understanding, noting the importance of explicitly naming the communities represented.

[4:12:05 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON responded that individuals present at the hearing and those testifying online would likely provide a clearer understanding of the full range of communities included within the Asian American and Pacific Islander category

[4:12:18 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS expressed strong support for SB 6 and shared that he has known many Asian Americans, noting Kodiak's long

history with the Filipino community, particularly in the fishing industry dating back to the early 1900s. He also mentioned that Alaska is now recruiting Filipino teachers due to a shortage of qualified educators in the U.S.

SENATOR STEVENS asked for clarification on whether SB 6 involves developing new curriculum and whether existing curriculum from other districts could be used instead. He acknowledged the current fiscal challenges in Alaska and emphasized that finding ways to reduce the bill's fiscal note would be helpful. He asked whether there is any way to reduce the fiscal note associated with SB 6.

[4:13:19 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON responded that she anticipated the question about the fiscal note and confirmed that she and her staff are actively looking into ways to reduce it. She mentioned having some ideas for potential cost savings and stated that they are committed to doing their best to either lower the cost or identify funding sources.

[4:14:08 PM](#)

KELLY MANNING, Deputy Director, Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, reviewed the fiscal note for SB 6. She outlined specific costs associated with implementing SB 6, primarily related to the approval of educational programs under the bill. She noted that although the state recently updated its social studies standards and has not conducted a full alignment analysis, the updated standards likely address the bill's required content. She stated that implementation would focus on developing a rubric to evaluate program alignment with SB 6. She identified the three one-time expenses listed in the fiscal note:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- 1) in FY26 \$30.0 for stipends (\$1.5 each) for 20 educators and community stakeholders for participation in the development of a rubric to evaluate programs;
- 2) in FY26 \$35.0 to contract an education expert to facilitate the development of a rubric for evaluation of programs; and
- 3) in FY27 \$6.0 for legal fees to implement the necessary regulation changes.

[4:15:42 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS asked for an explanation of the rubric mentioned in the fiscal note.

MS. MANNING explained that the rubric would serve as the evaluation tool for approving instructional programs at the state level under SB 6. Since the bill requires state-level approval of materials used for instruction in Asian American and Pacific Islander history, a formal process is needed. She stated that the rubric would be designed to align the requirements of the bill with existing state standards and would serve as the basis for evaluating submitted programs. Once developed, the rubric would allow districts or vendors to submit materials for approval. She added that approved materials would be compiled into a list, which districts could use to identify suitable curriculum options that meet the bill's requirements.

[4:17:06 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced invited testimony on SB 6.

[4:17:35 PM](#)

SHAYNE NUESCA, Co-Director, Make Us Visible Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 6. She identified herself as a person who grew up in Anchorage, attended the University of Alaska, worked as a journalist and is a co-founder of a media collective called Mana. She stated that SB 6 has widespread support and emphasized that many conversations about the bill have focused on how it can foster a greater sense of understanding and belonging. While she initially understood that vision conceptually, she said her discussions with the community helped her more deeply grasp its meaning. She shared an example from October, when Romig Middle School in Anchorage held a one-day Filipino American History class. She observed one of the class periods and described it as a powerful illustration of the bill's goals. She said the experience showed what greater belonging and cultural understanding could look like in Alaska schools. She urged the committee to pass SB 6.

[4:20:10 PM](#)

KAYE ROLDAN, Co-Director, Make Us Visible Alaska, Juneau, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 6. She said she is a long-time Juneau resident, and active member of the local Filipino community. She shared that she went through the Alaska public school system and graduated from the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS). She expressed strong support for SB 6, stating that she did not encounter Filipino history in school until a cultural geography class at UAS, where Filipino contributions to fisheries and mining were mentioned briefly. She emphasized that

one of her primary motivations for supporting SB 6 is the importance of representation and being reflected in the curriculum. She explained that inclusion in curriculum fosters a sense of belonging, identity, and self-confidence. Drawing from her background in education, she stated that when students learn about their culture from an early age, they develop pride and the confidence to share their heritage with others. She added that SB 6 can also help counter negative narratives and anti-Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) hate by ensuring that AAPI stories are included and taught. She concluded that SB 6 promotes cross-cultural understanding and helps build stronger, safer communities across Alaska.

[4:23:59 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN concluded invited testimony and opened public testimony on SB 6.

[4:24:20 PM](#)

HANNAH REBADULLA, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 6. She introduced herself as a Filipino American with a master's in clinical psychology and a PhD candidate in clinical-community psychology at the University of Alaska Anchorage. She stated her commitment to serving underrepresented communities through research and advocacy. She shared that growing up, she rarely saw stories like hers reflected in textbooks. She said Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are often misrepresented as perpetual immigrants, when in fact they have long-standing roots in the U.S. She emphasized that this lack of historical representation has serious consequences, citing a rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans nationwide, including in Alaska. She described two recent incidents of racial harassment she and her family experienced—one where a driver swerved toward her parents and another where a man threw a rock at her truck while she was with her son, followed by verbal abuse. She said these acts were rooted in ignorance and the perception that Asian Americans do not belong. She argued that education is a powerful tool to combat such bias. Citing research, she explained that inclusive curricula reduce prejudice and promote empathy. She urged support for SB 6 as both a policy and a commitment to a more accurate, inclusive, and just education system that affirms the identities and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

[4:26:58 PM](#)

LUCENA DELCASTILLO, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of SB 6 by reading her written testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

I am a first year Cadette in Girl Scouts. I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 6, an act requiring education in the history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

I have been a resident of Juneau, Alaska for 11 years and I am a 6th grade student at Auke Bay Elementary. My mother is Filipina and my father is German. I experienced racism in my school. Last month, a few classmates teased me about being Asian. They called me by the racial slur "Ching Chong". It was very hurtful and I will never forget that day coming home in tears.

Teaching Asian American and Pacific Islander history and culture is important because we need to learn about acceptance and understand different cultures. This is urgent to me because I do not want kids to be bullied for being an Asian American and Pacific Islander and I want to make my school a better place for all kids regardless of their race where they feel safe and belong.

Thank you for your consideration

[4:28:47 PM](#)

EDRIC CARRILLO, Vice President, Filipino Community of Alaska - Juneau, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of SB 6 by reading his written testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Chair Tobin, members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important piece of legislation today.

For the record, my name is Edric Carrillo, a lifelong Alaskan and Vice President of the Filipino Community of Juneau. I have served on the board for nearly a decade, but I have been involved with our community for as long as I can remember.

Growing up in Alaska, I didn't learn about Filipino history-or much about Asian American and Pacific Islander contributions-until high school. And even

then, it wasn't part of the curriculum; it was through a "Cultural Day" event where I first heard about the Alaskeros-Filipino cannery workers-and the Mestizos, who helped build Alaska's fishing industry and became an integral part of our state's history. From building Alaskan infrastructure to Filipino nurses and teachers who have, and continue to shape our healthcare and education systems, our history is deeply woven into the fabric of this state and nation.

4:30:02 PM

MR. CARRILLO continued his testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

I remember asking my parents why they never talked about this history, and their answer was simple: "We just wanted you to fit in. And we didn't know." They were also products of Alaska's K-12 system, and if they hadn't learned it, how could they pass it down to me? It wasn't until I became more involved in the Filipino Community that I truly started to grasp the depth of our contributions-not just to Alaska, but to American history as a whole. This bill is an opportunity to celebrate and educate, to instill pride in our shared history.

SB 6 is not about special treatment-it's about fair treatment. It ensures that all Alaskans have access to the full story of our state's history and the people who shaped it. When we talk about the great melting pot of America, that includes the Filipino and AAPI community, where in Juneau nearly 10 percent of the population is Filipino, and in other parts of Alaska such as Kodiak and Dutch Harbor, where the percentage is even higher. And of course, Anchorage which represents a rich tapestry of diverse cultures, all of which contribute to what makes Alaska-and America-so great.

This committee and the legislature made significant progress last year in advancing this bill. I urge you to help get it across the finish line this session and ensure it is signed into law-for students today and for future generations of Alaskans who deserve to know their history.

Thank you again for your time and for your continued support of SB 6.

4:32:10 PM

TAMMALIVIS, SALANOA, Director Assistant, Polynesian Association of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 6. She shared the personal story behind her name which symbolizing the people she carries with her. She expressed strong support for SB 6, stating that it wasn't until college that she began learning about the contributions of Pacific Islanders to the United States. Growing up, she was often mistaken for Hawaiian, and her only representation in the K-12 system came through spirit days like "Aloha Day," where she was handed a plastic lei and told "aloha"—despite being Samoan, not Hawaiian. She explained that she was born in American Samoa, a U.S. territory, and only discovered her family's deep historical ties to the country through her own research. She learned her great-grandfather formed a battalion in American Samoa during World War II and trained others in hand-to-hand combat. Her grandfather later served in the Vietnam War and was exposed to Agent Orange. These stories were unknown to her family due to silence around trauma and cultural norms discouraging open discussion. She said she found archival photos of her great-grandfather training what was called the "Barefoot Battalion" and said this discovery inspired her to speak out and share her family's legacy. She emphasized that in her culture, speaking publicly—especially as a woman—is not customary, but living in the U.S. taught her that people are interested in learning about Pacific Islander communities. She concluded by expressing her desire to educate others about the distinct cultures of Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia, and to affirm that Pacific Islanders are a vital part of the American story.

4:35:39 PM

CHAIR TOBIN closed public testimony on SB 6.

4:35:47 PM

CHAIR TOBIN held SB 6 in committee.

4:36:05 PM

SENATOR CRONK noted that SB 6 includes a requirement for school districts to provide department-approved education and asked whether this means every district must locate or adopt a specific curriculum. He expressed a preference for allowing AAPI communities to tell their own stories by creating their own curriculum, rather than requiring all districts to adopt pre-existing materials that may not accurately reflect local

perspectives. He emphasized that no one could tell AAPI stories better than the people themselves.

[4:36:54 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON stated her belief that school districts would collaborate with stakeholders—specifically members of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community—when developing or selecting curriculum to meet the requirements of SB 6.

[4:37:13 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON thanked the committee for hearing SB 6 in a timely manner and stated that she remains focused on ensuring the bill passes during the current legislative session.

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[4:38:02 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 4:38 p.m.