

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

March 21, 2025

3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Mike Cronk (via teleconference)

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Andi Story
Senator Scott Kawasaki
Representative Alyse Galvin
Representative Ky Holland

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 69(RLS) AM

"An Act relating to education; relating to open enrollment in public schools; relating to school and student performance reports; relating to school and district accountability; relating to charter schools; relating to an annual report for correspondence study programs; relating to the base student allocation; relating to reading proficiency incentive grants; relating to wireless telecommunications devices in public schools; relating to the duty of the legislature to pass a public education appropriation bill; relating to the duty of the governor to prepare a public education appropriation bill; establishing the Task Force on Education Funding; relating to a report on regulation of school districts; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 69

SHORT TITLE: EDUCATION FUNDING: INCREASE BSA
SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) HIMSCHOOT

01/24/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/24/25 (H) EDC, FIN
01/27/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
01/27/25 (H) Heard & Held
01/27/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
01/29/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
01/29/25 (H) Heard & Held
01/29/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
01/29/25 (H) EDC AT 5:00 PM DAVIS 106
01/29/25 (H) -- Public Testimony --
02/03/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/03/25 (H) Heard & Held
02/03/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
02/06/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519
02/06/25 (H) <Pending Referral>
02/12/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
02/12/25 (H) Heard & Held
02/12/25 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
02/12/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519
02/12/25 (H) <Pending Referral>
02/18/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519
02/18/25 (H) <Pending Referral>
02/19/25 (H) MOTION TO DISCHARGE FROM EDC, RULE
48(D)
02/19/25 (H) DISCHARGE FROM EDC, RULE 48, PASSED Y21
N18 E1
02/19/25 (H) RESCIND ACTION TO DISCHARGE FAILED Y19
N20 E1
02/19/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519
02/19/25 (H) Scheduled but Not Heard
02/20/25 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM ADAMS 519
02/20/25 (H) Moved HB 69 Out of Committee
02/20/25 (H) MINUTE(FIN)
02/21/25 (H) FIN RPT 5DP 4DNP 1NR 1AM
02/21/25 (H) DP: HANNAN, GALVIN, FOSTER, JOSEPHSON,
SCHRAGE
02/21/25 (H) DNP: TOMASZEWSKI, STAPP, ALLARD,
JOHNSON
02/21/25 (H) NR: JIMMIE
02/21/25 (H) AM: BYNUM
02/21/25 (H) MOTION TO WITHDRAW FROM RLS TO CAL,
RULE 18
02/21/25 (H) WITHDRAW FROM RLS TO CAL, RULE 18,
FAILED Y18 N20 E2

02/24/25 (H) MOTION TO WITHDRAW FROM RLS TO CAL,
RULE 18

02/24/25 (H) WITHDRAW FROM RLS TO CAL, RULE 18,
FAILED Y19 N19 E2

03/05/25 (H) RLS AT 8:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

03/05/25 (H) Moved CSHB 69(RLS) Out of Committee

03/05/25 (H) MINUTE(RLS)

03/06/25 (H) RULES TO CALENDAR PENDING RLS RPT/REF

03/06/25 (H) NOT TAKEN UP 3/6 - ON 3/10 CALENDAR

03/10/25 (H) RLS RPT CS(RLS) NEW TITLE 4DP 3AM

03/10/25 (H) DP: EDGMON, KOPP, SCHRAGE, STUTES

03/10/25 (H) AM: VANCE, COSTELLO, TILTON

03/10/25 (H) DEADLINE FOR ALL AMS AT 12 P.M. TODAY
Y21 N19

03/11/25 (H) BEFORE HOUSE IN SECOND READING

03/11/25 (H) TAKE AM 23 FROM TABLE UC

03/12/25 (H) MOTION TO RETURN TO EDC COMMITTEE, RULE
39 B, FAILED Y19 N21

03/12/25 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)

03/12/25 (H) VERSION: CSHB 69(RLS) AM

03/12/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

03/12/25 (S) <Pending Referral>

03/14/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS

03/14/25 (S) EDC, FIN

03/17/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

03/17/25 (S) Heard & Held

03/17/25 (S) MINUTE(EDC)

03/19/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

03/19/25 (S) Heard & Held

03/19/25 (S) MINUTE(EDC)

03/21/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE REBECCA HIMSCHOOT, District 2
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 69.

ANDY RATLIFF, Chief Financial Officer
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on HB 69.

STEVEN ROWE, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on HB 69.

FRANCIS MCLAUGHLIN, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

CYNDY MIKA, Superintendent
Kodiak Island Borough School District
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

DAWN COGAN, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with
consideration for correspondence schools.

PATTY BROWN, representing self
Haines, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

JACOB BERA, representing self
Peters Creek, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

JULIE ALCORN, representing self
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

DAVID BOYLE, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

CRAIG FREDEEN, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

POLLY CARR, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

TRACY FISHBACH, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

BRIAN SMITH, representing self
Petersburg, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

CHRISTINA TURMAN, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with concerns.

CYNTHIA LAGOUDAKIS, representing self
Petersburg, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

MIKE COONS, representing self
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

RACHAEL POSEY, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

CHERIE TAYLOR, representing self
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on HB 69.

BREE SWANSON, representing self
Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

KATHLEEN YERBICH, representing self
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 69 with concerns.

RHONDA PROWELL KITTER, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with concerns.

MEGAN PELTIER, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

KELLEY POLASKY, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

MIGUEL RAMIREZ, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

MIRIAM MEZZETTI, representing self
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with suggestions.

CARL JACOBS, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with suggestions.

ANTHONY CRAVALHO, Director
Planning and Development
Maniilaq Association
Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ELAINE RIDLON, Member
Charter School Academic Policy Council (APC) Board
Houston, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 69 with concerns.

AUDRI JIRAK, representing self
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 69 with concerns.

KRISTEN GRIESER, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with concerns.

HANNAH MURKIN, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69.

SUSANNE ALDRIDGE, representing self
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with comments.

JAMES BOTT, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

KIM HANISCH, Superintendent
Unalaska City School District
Unalaska, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

CISCO MERCADO, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support HB 69 with suggestions.

MARY CATHERINE MARTIN, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ANJALI MADERIA, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

MATTHEW FORESTER, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with concerns.

ARIANNA MARTINEZ, representing self
Sterling, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with concerns.

BRIAN LYKE, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

DAVID HALBROOK, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on HB 69.

SARAH LEWIS, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ANDREW LEMZ, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

PAUL RIOUX, representing self
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with concerns.

WHITNEY WIGREN, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ALYSSA LOGAN, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

BRANDY HARTY, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

DORA WILSON, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

KRISTINA VAN HOOGMOED, representing self
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

TRACY SCHAFFER, representing self
Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ANDREA SCOTT, representing self
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 69 with suggestions.

BRIDGET MCBRIDE, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ASHLEY MINAEI, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

RICK MORGAN, President
Mat-Su Classified Employees Association
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with suggestions.

WINTER MARSHALL-ALLEN, representing self
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with concerns.

SHARON HOLLAND, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69 with concerns.

DIANA LEINBERGER, representing self
Fairbank, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 69.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:05 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Bjorkman, Stevens, Kiehl, and Chair Tobin. Senator Cronk joined by teleconference.

HB 69-EDUCATION FUNDING: INCREASE BSA

[3:32:12 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 69(RLS) am "An Act relating to education; relating to open enrollment in public schools; relating to school and student performance reports; relating to school and district accountability; relating to charter schools; relating to an annual report for correspondence study programs; relating to the base student allocation; relating to reading proficiency incentive grants; relating to wireless telecommunications devices in public schools; relating to the duty of the legislature to pass a public education appropriation bill; relating to the duty of the governor to prepare a public education appropriation bill; establishing the Task Force on Education Funding; relating to a report on regulation of school districts; and providing for an effective date."

[3:33:25 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN invited the sponsor of HB 69 to present the bill.

[3:33:26 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE REBECCA HIMSCHOOT, District 2, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of HB 69 expressed gratitude for the opportunity to present HB 69. She stated that Alaskans have shown significant interest in the bill. She emphasized that inaction could lead to unimaginable consequences, while successfully passing the bill could bring infinite benefits.

[3:34:35 PM](#)

ANDY RATLIFF, Chief Financial Officer, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on HB 69. He acknowledged the difficult decisions facing the legislature and offered a brief overview of Anchorage School District's (ASD) proposed budget for FY26 and the potential impact of HB 69. He explained that ASD builds its budget based on codified revenue, which for FY26 totals \$5,960 per student, resulting in a structural deficit of approximately \$110 million. Since 2011, inflation has steadily eroded purchasing power, and the district

has used one-time funds, savings, and federal COVID relief to offset deficits.

MR. RATLIFF emphasized that education is a personnel-driven service, with 87 percent of ASD's budget allocated to salaries and benefits. He noted that even modest increases to retain staff lead to fewer total employees due to budget constraints. To balance the FY26 budget under the current Base Student Allocation (BSA), ASD proposes using \$50 million in savings and cutting over \$60 million from operations, leading to increased class sizes, school closures, staff reductions, and elimination of multiple programs, including middle school and certain high school sports, the IGNITE program for gifted students, and language immersion support. Major maintenance and equipment replacement funds would also be significantly reduced, worsening the district's \$1.5 billion deferred maintenance backlog.

[3:36:51 PM](#)

MR. RATLIFF stated that a \$1,000 BSA increase under HB 69 would help avoid these cuts. He addressed concerns about how new funds would be spent, noting the ASD school board amended its FY26 budget to explicitly allocate additional funds to restoring class size reductions, school programs, support staff, and services, while administrative cuts would not be reversed. He underscored the urgency of resolving education funding, as ASD is preparing to issue layoff notices based on current shortfalls and delays in funding decisions hinder the ability to fill positions with qualified staff.

[3:38:17 PM](#)

MR. RATLIFF added that the original version of HB 69 offered a long-term funding fix by tying BSA increases to inflation, which would enable better financial planning, workforce stability, and student achievement. He criticized the pattern of informing staff of possible layoffs, followed by uncertain restoration, which destabilizes the workforce. He concluded by expressing concern that other state agencies have received inflationary increases while education funding has stagnated.

[3:40:46 PM](#)

STEVEN ROWE, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on HB 69. He said he is a lifelong Alaskan and parent of three children in the Anchorage School District (ASD) and supports HB 69 along with an increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA). He expressed frustration with the yearly debates over education funding, which have led to instability and the removal of advanced academic programs his daughter would

benefit from. He shared that due to recent cuts, his family had to seek enrichment opportunities outside the district to keep his daughter engaged.

MR. ROWE said he is a co-owner of Swalling General Contractors and shared that the quality of Alaska's education system has become a key factor in workforce recruitment. He recounted a recent case where a job candidate declined a generous offer due to Alaska's underfunded schools. He noted that many industry leaders face similar challenges and emphasized that businesses are losing talent because families prioritize well-funded education systems. He urged lawmakers to find a permanent funding solution, even if it requires implementing taxes. He emphasized that continued underfunding harms children and drives families out of state.

[3:43:01 PM](#)

MR. ROWE called attention to the growing concern that Alaska is falling behind other states in education, making it harder to attract and retain both families and skilled workers. As a member of industry boards such as the Associated General Contractors (AGC) and Construction Industry Progress Fund (CIPF), he stressed that education funding impacts the broader economy and workforce. He encouraged full support of HB 69 as a necessary investment in Alaska's future and offered to speak further with legislators if needed.

[3:45:34 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN opened public testimony on HB 69.

[3:45:57 PM](#)

FRANCIS MCLAUGHLIN, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. He said he is a parent of two daughters in the Chinese Immersion Program at Scenic Park Elementary School in Anchorage and emphasized the importance of consistent education funding. He described the school as academically strong, diverse, and staffed with excellent teachers. He stated that language immersion programs cannot be replicated at home and are directly linked to future career opportunities, including with the National Security Agency (NSA) and private sector employers like Wells Fargo. He explained that public education plays a critical role in building a skilled workforce and supporting Alaska's economy. He stressed that strong public schools are essential for economic growth and noted that most Alaskan families choose public education. He stated that adequately funding public education is a core constitutional responsibility of the state and should not

require parents to take time off work to advocate for it. He warned that without stable funding, successful programs like Ignite and language immersion are at risk, and one-third of departing teachers will not return.

3:48:38 PM

CYNDY MIKA, Superintendent, Kodiak Island Borough School District (KIBSD), Kodiak, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 and a \$1,000 increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA). She stated the bill is critical to the future of the district and its students. Since 2011, KIBSD enrollment has declined by 21 percent, while the number of students with intensive needs has increased by 286 percent. During the same period, heating oil prices rose by 30 percent and two-bedroom rental costs increased by 39 percent.

MS. MIKA reported that for FY26, KIBSD faces an \$8 million deficit, leading to the closure of an elementary school and the elimination of 23 positions. Since 2023, the district has cut 72 positions, representing 22 percent of its workforce, yet still struggles to fill teacher vacancies. She explained that recruitment has become so difficult that KIBSD now sponsors 26 certified teachers from the Philippines to meet staffing needs.

MS. MIKA emphasized that financial uncertainty severely limits the district's ability to plan responsibly. She highlighted the importance of HB 69's March 15 funding deadline, which would allow school districts to make informed financial decisions and offer stability to students and staff.

MIKKA concluded that the proposed BSA increase is essential not just for balancing the budget but for preserving educational quality. She warned that without additional funding, staff reductions and service gaps will continue to harm students and urged full support for HB 69.

3:51:20 PM

DAWN COGAN, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with consideration for correspondence schools. She expressed gratitude for Alaska's longstanding support of parental rights and school choice. She emphasized that homeschooling parents, particularly through programs like IDEA, are deeply engaged in their children's education. She shared that her adult children—one a writer and mother, the other a foreman in the plumbing and pipefitting trade—are productive members of society. She thanked the Legislature for increasing the BSA for the 2025-2026 school year and urged full funding for

correspondence schools, noting the positive impact these students have in communities across the state.

3:53:21 PM

PATTY BROWN, representing self, Haines, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is a third-generation public school educator and shared her experience teaching for 22 years in rural Alaska. She stated that while no single factor guarantees student success, multiple elements, such as curriculum, funding, and teacher support, must work together to improve outcomes. She said she supports embedding inflation adjustments in the funding formula and went on to emphasize accountability through meaningful local assessments and stakeholder transparency rather than punitive reviews.

MS. BROWN urged minimizing reliance on standardized tests, which take away from instructional time, and encouraged using classroom-based assessments aligned with instruction. She supported the \$450 reading proficiency grant and highlighted the need for strong K-12 science programs to boost overall literacy and math achievement. She concluded by calling for better teacher compensation, particularly in rural areas, to reflect the true cost of living and support student success across Alaska.

3:56:06 PM

JACOB BERA, representing self, Peters Creek, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. He said he is a parent of three children in Anchorage public schools and a teacher. He reported that his high school, Eagle River High, is preparing to eliminate 6 of its 30 teaching positions, 20 percent of its staff, after years of gradual cuts since 2012, when the school had 44 teachers. He stated that enrollment has declined slightly but not enough to justify such severe reductions and that creating a workable master schedule is becoming nearly impossible.

MR. BERA described district-wide impacts, including cuts to his daughter's middle school, which may lose all middle school sports, and his youngest child's elementary school, which is facing the loss of four teachers and its Spanish Immersion program. He shared that his family is now questioning whether their children will remain at the schools they once dreamed of attending. He urged the Legislature to prioritize adequate school funding and not let ideological debates stall critical support for neighborhood schools, which serve the majority of Alaskan families. He concluded by stating that accountability

and reforms cannot be meaningfully addressed until base funding needs are met.

[3:58:49 PM](#)

JULIE ALCORN, representing self, Kenai, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is a counselor with the Kenai Peninsula School District and a longtime educator and business owner. She compared public education to running a successful business, stating that both require early, stable, and adequate financial planning. She urged the Legislature to finalize education funding by March, as proposed in the bill, so school boards can build responsible budgets and offer staff job security.

MS. ALCORN emphasized the importance of retaining experienced teachers, noting that raising the BSA and adjusting for inflation are essential to stabilize schools. She shared that many educators, including herself, are now experiencing stress and uncertainty about their jobs, leading them to consider leaving the profession or the state. She called on lawmakers to stop the cycle of instability and support those working to educate Alaska's children.

[4:01:24 PM](#)

DAVID BOYLE, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in opposition to HB 69. He questioned whether increasing K-12 education funding would lead to higher student achievement. He cited Legislative Finance data showing a 34 percent funding increase since 2006 and argued that HB 69 largely maintains a system that is not serving all students well. He criticized the bill's treatment of correspondence students, comparing it to historical inequities, and called for equitable funding for alternative education models.

MR. BOYLE raised concerns about restrictions on school choice in HB 69, Section 1, vague academic performance measures in Section 4, and limitations on student testing comparisons in Section 8. He opposed increased administrative costs for charter schools in Section 13 and pointed out the contradiction in Section 32, which seeks to reduce regulatory burdens while adding new reporting requirements. He concluded by stating that the bill appears to prioritize neighborhood schools over educational options like charter and correspondence programs.

CHAIR TOBIN CHAIR TOBIN stated her belief that historically Black Americans were counted as three-fifths of a person, not four-fifths.

[4:03:50 PM](#)

CRAIG FREDEEN, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. He said he is a mechanical engineer with over 28 years of experience designing infrastructure in Alaska. He argued that raising the BSA would reduce long-term operational costs for school districts and improve educational outcomes by allowing for proper maintenance of school facilities.

MR. FREDEEN explained that budget cuts over the past decade have severely impacted maintenance departments, leading to deteriorating infrastructure that harms learning environments and could trigger constitutional lawsuits. He emphasized that \$1 spent on preventative maintenance offsets \$3 in emergency or premature replacement costs. He cited a recent study by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) showing that improved HVAC systems correlated with higher test scores and reduced absenteeism.

[4:06:24 PM](#)

POLLY CARR, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 and said she is a 27-year Anchorage resident, business owner, and parent. She emphasized that strong public schools are essential to a stable economy and Alaska's future. She expressed frustration over the Legislature's repeated failure to act on funding increases, despite years of advocacy.

MS. CARR rejected claims that school funding lacks accountability, noting that all district budgets are audited and reviewed by the Department of Education and Early Development. She criticized state leaders for enacting the Alaska Reads Act without sufficient funding and argued that underfunding education is more costly in the long run. She warned that without action her daughter's school would lose support staff. She called for leadership that reflects long-term vision and values.

[4:09:03 PM](#)

TRACY FISHBACH, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 and said she is a 28-year Alaska resident and parent of two Anchorage School District students nearing graduation. She expressed full support for HB 69 and a \$1,000 increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA). She stated her willingness to support a smaller Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD), new taxes, or other revenue measures to fund the increase. She explained that her family chose to stay in Alaska because of its

strong public schools, but recent declines in services, school closures, and larger class sizes would have influenced that decision differently today.

MS. FISHBACH challenged the notion that increased funding doesn't lead to better outcomes, asserting that hard work, talent, and investment together drive success. She shared that her children thrived due to small class sizes and family support but noted that many students without those advantages risk falling short of their potential. She urged full support for HB 69, emphasizing the long-term value of investing in all Alaskan students.

[4:11:19 PM](#)

BRIAN SMITH, representing self, Petersburg, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. He said he supports HB 69 in its amended form, calling the \$1,000 Base Student Allocation (BSA) increase the bare minimum. He expressed disappointment that the amendment removed future inflation adjustments but welcomed the addition of the March 15 funding deadline. He urged lawmakers to pass the bill as a necessary compromise to fund schools and invest in Alaska's children.

[4:12:25 PM](#)

CHRISTINA TURMAN, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with concerns. She stated that the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District faces a \$16 million deficit and urged legislators to continue working toward compromise. She expressed appreciation for the BSA increase in HB 69 and emphasized the need for bipartisan cooperation to pass a strong, veto-proof education funding bill.

MS. TURMAN advocated for adding transportation funding to HB 69, noting broad support across party lines. She called on legislators to use their position to restore long-term stability to Alaska's schools.

[4:14:30 PM](#)

CYNTHIA LAGOUDAKIS, representing self, Petersburg, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She shared her experience caring for a teen who lost both parents and later needed support from school staff during a difficult transition. She highlighted how school personnel provided immediate, comprehensive support in situations involving bullying and a student at risk of suicide, demonstrating that schools serve far beyond academic instruction.

MS. LAGOUDAKIS emphasized that school staff address behavioral health, food insecurity, homelessness, and more, and should be fairly compensated for their essential roles. She called for funding HB 69 to support safe facilities, reasonable class sizes, and system stability, stressing that the Base Student Allocation (BSA) had not been significantly increased in over a decade. She added that access to extracurriculars had a direct, positive impact on their foster teen's academic turnaround.

[4:16:32 PM](#)

MIKE COONS, representing self, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in opposition to HB 69. He provided four reasons why he does not support the bill.

[4:19:17 PM](#)

RACHAEL POSEY, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is a lifelong Alaskan and parent of two Anchorage School District students. She expressed concern over the lack of consistent school funding in Alaska. She noted that one-time funding has created instability, leading to school closures, overcrowded classrooms, and rising teacher vacancies. Her daughter's middle school began the year at 120 percent capacity without enough chairs in math class.

MS. POSEY emphasized that smaller class sizes improve student outcomes and that an increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA) is needed for districts to hire more teachers. She pointed out that Alaska is producing fewer new teachers each year and relies on out-of-state and international recruitment, which requires stable, predictable funding. She urged support for HB 69, emphasized its benefits for all types of students, and called on legislators to be ready to override a veto, stating that Alaska's children cannot afford more delays.

[4:21:32 PM](#)

CHERIE TAYLOR, representing self, Soldotna, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 but with concerns. She said she is a homeschooling parent on the Kenai Peninsula and voiced strong support for the BSA increase. She emphasized the need for continued support of student education but raised concerns about the lack of equitable funding for correspondence students, noting that they do not receive standard BSA multipliers such as the special education factor.

MS. TAYLOR also questioned the proposed task force in HB 69, urging that it include voices beyond legislators—specifically from rural, urban, charter, traditional, and correspondence education communities. She described the accountability required

of homeschool parents, including individualized learning plans, work samples, and grading. She praised Alaska's educational flexibility and shared how homeschooling has benefited her family by allowing for individualized instruction and family cohesion.

[4:23:41 PM](#)

BREE SWANSON, representing self, Kotzebue, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is a mother of four and a behavioral health worker. She spoke in strong support of HB 69 and the full \$1,000 Base Student Allocation (BSA) increase. She expressed deep concern about the ongoing decline in the education system, particularly its impact on her eighth-grade daughter. She noted a direct connection between reduced school support and the rise in youth mental health and substance abuse issues.

MS. SWANSON emphasized the central role schools play in rural communities as safe spaces and stressed the need for stable staffing, which is undermined by unpredictable funding. She recalled the continuity of teachers in her own education, contrasting it with today's high turnover. She called for long-term solutions, not temporary fixes, and stated her willingness as a taxpayer to support increased revenue for education. She urged legislators to prioritize children and pass HB 69.

[4:26:15 PM](#)

KATHLEEN YERBICH, representing self, Wasilla, Alaska, testified on HB 69 with concerns. She expressed appreciation for the work on HB 69 but raised concerns about provisions that could negatively impact charter schools. She opposed doubling the indirect rate from 4 percent to 8 percent, stating it would divert limited resources from classrooms to district overhead. She explained that charter schools often pay out of pocket for services like copier repair and pest control—costs typically covered for neighborhood schools.

MS. YERBICH also objected to the provision limiting charter schools to carrying over only 10 percent of unspent funds, arguing it penalizes fiscal responsibility. She noted that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District recently adopted a policy allowing charter schools to carry over more than 10 percent and urged the state to consider a similar approach. Additionally, she criticized the proposed three-hour testing limit, explaining that students already exceed this time on assessments like the Alaska STAR exam.

[4:28:56 PM](#)

RHONDA PROWELL KITTER, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with concerns. She said she is a parent of a first grader at Aquarian Charter School and treasurer of its Academic Policy Committee. She argued that the debate over how to fund the Base Student Allocation (BSA) should not be isolated to education but considered in the context of the entire state budget. She rejected claims that declining test scores and absenteeism are reasons to oppose the bill, stating these issues stem from years of underfunding, which have increased class sizes and reduced support for educators.

MS. KITTER highlighted that dedicated staff continue to operate under inadequate budgets that strain resources and student outcomes. She expressed concern over HB 69, Section 11, which caps charter schools' budget carryover at 10 percent, warning that it could limit financial flexibility. She urged legislators to support HB 69 to give schools the funding and stability needed to serve Alaska's students.

[4:31:16 PM](#)

MEGAN PELTIER, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is a mother of three Anchorage School District elementary students and a nearly 40-year Alaska resident. She shared that her children attend a neighborhood French Immersion program, which supports literacy and academic achievement but is now at risk due to inadequate funding.

MS. PELTIER warned that without an increase, her school could face combination classes at every grade level, some nearing 50 students—conditions that undermine learning. She stressed the importance of stable, reliable funding for programs that depend on visa-sponsored teachers, noting that the current uncertainty prevents timely hiring. She urged lawmakers to prioritize education and maintain the \$1,000 BSA increase in HB 69, stating it is long overdue and critical for Alaska's future.

[4:33:48 PM](#)

KELLEY POLASKY, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 and said she is a homeschooling parent, spoke in support of increasing the Base Student Allocation (BSA) and emphasized the value of supporting individualized education options like homeschooling. She shared that homeschooling has positively impacted her family by allowing her to tailor learning to each child's unique strengths and needs.

MS. POLASKY explained that while one child thrived with one-on-one instruction and now excels in college, another child prefers structured, traditional settings. She noted that funding cuts led her family to withdraw from the local school-based gifted program and homeschool instead, which allowed for continued academic challenge and flexibility. She urged support for increased funding and continued recognition of homeschooling

[4:35:41 PM](#)

MIGUEL RAMIREZ, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in opposition to HB 69. He said he is a public high school graduate and expressed concern over increasing education funding without identifying a sustainable revenue source. He opposed spending beyond available funds, comparing it to writing a check without money to cover it. He suggested that those supporting a Base Student Allocation (BSA) increase should advocate for higher local property taxes rather than state-level funding that could impact the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD).

MR. RAMIREZ stated that his local school board has made significant progress reducing its deficit and argued that more parents are choosing alternatives to brick-and-mortar schools. He questioned why a recent local government decision opposed moving money around to pay for deferred maintenance if the community cares for its children. He encouraged all parties to work together on education policy solutions.

[4:38:21 PM](#)

MIRIAM MEZZETTI, representing self, Eagle River, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with suggestions. She said she is a 2011 graduate of an Alaskan homeschool correspondence program and would like HB 69 to consider homeschool programs for increased funding. She shared her academic achievements as a product of alternative education in Alaska. She participated in academic competitions, took college courses through the University of Alaska system, and scored in the top 0.5 percent on the PSAT and SAT, qualifying for the National Merit Scholarship.

MS. MEZZETTI was accepted to multiple prestigious universities and graduated summa cum laude from Alaska Pacific University with a 4.0 GPA. She expressed her desire for all Alaskan students—whether in public, private, charter, or homeschool programs—to have access to the same level of opportunity and support she experienced.

[4:40:03 PM](#)

CARL JACOBS, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with suggestions. He said he serves on the board of Anchorage School District's as vice president. The Anchorage School District (ASD) passed a balanced FY26 budget on February 25, as required by law, despite ongoing challenges caused by the Legislature's failure to adjust the foundation formula for inflation since FY11. He described years of difficult decisions, including cutting essential programs and increasing class sizes to remain within statute-defined funding levels.

MR. JACOBS explained that the ASD budget includes an amendment showing how a \$1,000 Base Student Allocation (BSA) increase could restore class sizes to 2016 levels, reinstate language immersion and Ignite programs, bring back sports, and improve staffing for counselors and librarians. He said it would also allow for implementation of reading specialists and high-dose tutoring aligned with the Alaska Reads Act.

MR. JACOBS asked the committee to consider three points before amending the bill: recognize that the \$1,000 BSA is already a compromise; ensure open enrollment language protects neighborhood preference and local control; and adopt a two-way accountability amendment requiring the Legislature to report annually on hours members spend visiting or volunteering in public schools. He stated such a report would promote transparency and help evaluate the impact of education funding.

[4:42:20 PM](#)

ANTHONY CRAVALHO, Director, Planning and Development, Maniilaq Association, Kotzebue, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. He said he represents the Maniilaq Association, a coalition of six regional nonprofits serving over 70,000 Alaskans across 209 communities. He spoke in support of a meaningful increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA) through HB 69 and emphasized that rural schools are central to the communities they serve; when schools struggle, the impact is felt across health care, behavioral health, public safety, and workforce recruitment. He urged the Legislature to work collaboratively to identify necessary revenue and prioritize the future of Alaska's children by ensuring stable education funding.

[4:43:52 PM](#)

ELAINE RIDLON, Member, Charter School Academic Policy Council (APC) Board, Houston, Alaska, testified on HB 69 with concerns. She said she is a charter school parent and member of a charter school Academic Policy Committee (APC) who has concerns on

several provisions in HB 69. She emphasized the need for more support in launching charter schools, noting that many strong proposals are delayed or denied due to lack of local guidance.

MS. RIDLON opposed doubling the indirect rate from 4 percent to 8 percent, explaining that charter schools already cover building, utility, and operational costs that traditional public schools do not. She also opposed the 10 percent cap on carryover funds, arguing it penalizes fiscal responsibility. She supported the bill's inclusion of an expedited appeal process for denied or revoked charter contracts. She concluded by affirming that charter schools are public schools serving public students and called on legislators to protect funding that directly supports students and their learning environments.

[4:46:30 PM](#)

AUDRI JIRAK, representing self, Wasilla, Alaska, testified on HB 69 with concerns. She said she is a parent of a student at American Charter Academy and expressed concern that sections of HB 69 could negatively impact charter schools. She opposed increasing the indirect rate from 4 percent to 8 percent, stating it would divert funds away from classrooms, teachers, and student resources. She noted that charter schools like hers are responsible for covering all building, utility, staffing, and operational expenses without district support.

MS. JIRAK also objected to the provision limiting charter schools to carrying over only 10 percent of unspent funds, highlighting that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District already allows greater carryover with approval. She referenced a recent Harvard study showing Alaska's charter schools lead the nation in math and reading performance and urged legislators to remove roadblocks and protect funding so charter schools can continue to thrive and serve students effectively.

[4:49:14 PM](#)

KRISTEN GRIESER, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with concerns. She said she has been a homeschool parent for 13 years and shared her experience using a state correspondence program for the past nine years. She described working in partnership with certified teachers, submitting learning plans and progress reports, and tailoring her children's education to their individual learning styles. Her son, now a senior taking classes at the University of Alaska Southeast, and her daughters have benefited academically and personally from the flexibility homeschooling provides.

MS. GRIESER emphasized that her children are avid readers, engaged in extracurriculars like theater, part-time work, and church volunteering—activities supported by the time flexibility of homeschooling. She stressed that education should be accessible through multiple pathways and that students thrive in different learning environments. She supported the BSA increase in HB 69, stating that, if applied equitably, it will benefit all students across Alaska.

[4:51:39 PM](#)

HANNAH MURKIN, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in opposition to HB 69. She said that while all Alaska school districts could benefit from a Base Student Allocation (BSA) increase, HB 69 does not fully address the needs of all publicly funded students, specifically those in correspondence programs. She noted that the current \$1,000 BSA increase results in a lower practical funding increase for correspondence students and advocated for increasing the correspondence funding factor from 0.9 to 1.0, which would direct an additional \$736,000 to districts offering these programs.

MS. MURKIN stated that correspondence programs already measure academic achievement through work samples and progress reports in partnership with certified teachers, providing accountability. She recommended that the proposed task force on education funding and accountability include representation from rural, urban, charter, correspondence, and traditional education sectors. She concluded by urging improvements to HB 69 to ensure equitable support for all students and called for identifying a revenue source that does not rely on the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD).

[4:53:45 PM](#)

SUSANNE ALDRIDGE, representing self, Kenai, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with comments. She said she is a homeschool educator, mother, fifth-generation Alaskan, and small business owner and spoke to the accountability already in place for homeschooling families. She described the structured collaboration between parents and certified teachers, including individualized learning plans and required work samples.

MS. ALDRIDGE shared how her family's educational choices, such as Civil Air Patrol, private music and archery lessons, and community sports, not only support her children's development but also stimulate the local economy by reinvesting student funds into businesses and services across the state. She emphasized that homeschooling goes beyond finances—it

strengthens community connections and contributes to statewide educational and economic success.

[4:55:37 PM](#)

JAMES BOTT, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. He said he is the parent of two West Anchorage High School students and spoke in support of HB 69 and a \$1,000 increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA), along with inflation adjustments going forward. He noted that both of his sons play hockey, a program threatened by continued underfunding, and warned that losing such activities would drive families, his own included, to question staying in Alaska.

MR. BOTT stated that he has seen a steady decline in school quality over his 19 years in Anchorage, including overcrowded classrooms, reduced teacher morale, and cuts to vital programs. He emphasized that the Anchorage School District is reaching a breaking point and pointed out that the Legislature approved its own salary increase due to inflation—an argument he believes applies equally to education funding. He urged lawmakers to pass HB 69 and end the annual funding uncertainty faced by school districts.

[4:58:00 PM](#)

KIM HANISCH, Superintendent, Unalaska City School District, Unalaska, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 and urged the Legislature to ensure it includes a \$1,000 increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA). She shared that the Unalaska City School District (UCSD), one of Alaska's higher-achieving districts, faces a 12 percent budget deficit for FY26. Without the full BSA increase, the district will rely on only a \$450 increase to build its budget, which will require transferring restricted funds, cutting a high school teaching position, increasing elementary class sizes, and making widespread reductions.

MS. HANISCH explained that every cut harms students and staff—reducing not just instruction but also the presence of caring adults in schools. Cuts to custodians, librarians, and student activities degrade the learning environment and lead to staff burnout. She emphasized that these reductions directly impact the heart of the community and called on the Legislature to pass HB 69 with the full BSA increase to protect educational services and student success.

[5:00:46 PM](#)

CISCO MERCADO, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with suggestions, stating he is not a parent but supports reduced Permanent Fund Dividends (PFDs) if the money goes toward education. He acknowledged that HB 69 is not perfect but described it as a good compromise. He urged the committee to address the root cause of inadequate school funding, which he attributed to current and past governors and legislators failing to fund the Base Student Allocation (BSA) adequately. He recommended adding a provision to adjust the BSA for inflation or cost of living using a standard economic metric, so future legislators are not required to revisit the issue repeatedly, and education funding does not continue to be the first area cut.

[5:03:02 PM](#)

MARY CATHERINE MARTIN, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She testified as a parent of two young children in public school and expressed concern about the long-term effects of unreliable education funding. She shared that her kindergartner began school without an assigned teacher due to budget uncertainty caused by the governor's funding veto. She emphasized that such instability harms both students and educator morale. She urged full funding of HB 69 to ensure reliable support for schools and to help retain families in Alaska.

[5:05:25 PM](#)

ANJALI MADERIA, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is a parent of three children, two currently enrolled in Anchorage School District special programs and one entering kindergarten next year. She stated that underfunding has severely impacted enrichment programs, noting that the highly gifted program lost 78 percent of its teaching staff last year due to lack of support. She described teacher burnout from large class sizes and staffing shortages, which have affected basic activities like organizing a science fair or ensuring substitute coverage. She urged full funding of HB 69 to help retain families like hers in Alaska, emphasizing that educational quality is the primary factor in their decision to stay or leave.

[5:08:15 PM](#)

MATTHEW FORESTER, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with concerns. He testified as a homeschool parent of three daughters and emphasized the importance of respecting all forms of public education, including traditional, charter, and correspondence schools. He

supported HB 69 for raising the Base Student Allocation (BSA) but expressed concern about the proposed task force, stating it should include representatives from diverse educational backgrounds and communities, not just legislators. He shared success stories from his own homeschooling experience, highlighting his children's academic and professional achievements. He urged the legislature to ensure equitable treatment of all schooling models and to revise the task force language to reduce partisanship.

[5:10:57 PM](#)

ARIANNA MARTINEZ, representing self, Sterling, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with concerns. She said she is a homeschool parent of four sons and moved to Alaska six years ago specifically for its school choice options. She supported increased funding for all students but expressed concern that HB 69 is not equitable for all school types. She called for changes to the task force, geographic considerations, and the bill's overall structure to better reflect diverse educational models. She supported passing the bill with funding but urged further refinement to ensure fairness.

[5:12:05 PM](#)

BRIAN LYKE, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. He said he is a lifelong Anchorage resident, public school teacher, and parent of two daughters who attend their neighborhood school, where his wife also works as a school counselor. He expressed frustration with the legislature's failure to adequately fund public education and emphasized that, as an educator, he sees both the potential and the significant needs of students. He highlighted the broader community and economic benefits of strong education funding. He urged the committee to pass HB 69 with the full \$1,000 increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA).

[5:14:52 PM](#)

DAVID HALBROOK, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified on HB 69. He said he is the parent of three children enrolled in the IDEA correspondence program and spoke in support of homeschooling and parental choice in education. He emphasized that correspondence programs like IDEA and Raven reflect Alaska's cooperative independence and have positively impacted his family's educational experience in Fairbanks. He urged the legislature not to target correspondence programs in education reform, stating they are not the source of the system's financial challenges. He encouraged lawmakers to focus on root

causes and support parents as primary decision-makers in their children's education.

[5:17:12 PM](#)

SARAH LEWIS, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 and as a parent of three school-age children and urged the Senate Education Committee to include at least a \$1,000 increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA) in HB 69. She criticized opposition to funding increases and clarified that HB 69, as originally written, only adjusts for inflation, restoring the 2025 BSA to 2012 spending power. She described the impact of repeated school closures in Fairbanks, including her children's school, and shared frustration that a well-supported magnet school proposal failed due to lack of funds. She emphasized that investment in education is essential economic development and called on the legislature to fulfill its responsibility.

[5:20:10 PM](#)

ANDREW LEMZ, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 and urged swift passage of the bill with the full \$1,000 increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA). He shared that he and his wife have lived in Alaska for over 20 years, work as professional consultants on major infrastructure projects, and are raising two daughters in the Anchorage School District, including one in the Chinese Immersion program at Scenic Park Elementary. He expressed concern about the future of immersion programs and emphasized their value in attracting and retaining professionals. He called on the committee to act quickly to support education funding so districts can plan for fall.

[5:22:07 PM](#)

PAUL RIOUX, representing self, Sitka, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with concerns and reminded the committee that the Alaska Constitution requires the legislature to establish and maintain a public education system. He stated that Alaska's schools are visibly eroding due to failure to adjust funding for inflation. The failure of the legislature to fund education has created a burden that has unfairly shifted to administrators. He urged legislators to make a focused funding plan to ensure students, who are future leaders, receive the education they need. He supported addressing funding in HB 69 and recommended saving other policy issues for separate legislation.

[5:23:56 PM](#)

WHITNEY WIGREN, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 and was joined by her son Landon, a third grader in the Japanese Immersion Program, who asked the committee to increase education funding. She is a graduate of the same immersion program at Sand Lake Elementary and credited it for her educational and professional success, including her current role as an FBI intelligence analyst. She stated her family returned to Anchorage specifically for the program and warned they would leave the district if it were eliminated. She urged the legislature to fund education adequately, stating that failure to raise the Base Student Allocation (BSA) over the last decade is unacceptable and harms future opportunities for Alaska's children.

[5:26:16 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL thanked Ms. Wigren's son, stating "well done" in Japanese.

[5:26:37 PM](#)

ALYSSA LOGAN, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 and urged the legislature to increase the Base Student Allocation (BSA) by at least \$1,000. She is a fourth-generation Alaskan, a graduate of Anchorage Public Schools and the University of Alaska, a current teacher, and a parent of two children in the Anchorage School District. She shared that her daughter recently asked to testify to save the Spanish Immersion Program, highlighting how normal it has become for children to plead for the survival of their own education programs. She stated that chronic underfunding has led to larger class sizes, fewer teachers, and the loss of vital programs, contributing to a demoralizing environment for educators.

[5:29:10 PM](#)

BRANDY HARTY, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is a member of the Fairbanks North Star School Board and that the district passed its recommended budget the previous night, which includes millions in cuts and an increase in the pupil-teacher ratio by one. She emphasized that even with assumed one-time funding equal to last year's, class sizes still had to grow. She noted that millions of dollars district programs were made last year also. In her three years on the board, she has only seen cuts and has repeatedly voted for budgets she believes are harmful to students and educators. She urged the legislature to increase the Base Student Allocation (BSA) by at least \$1,000 as a necessary first step and warned that continued underfunding is driving families like hers to consider leaving Alaska.

[5:31:17 PM](#)

DORA WILSON, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is a therapeutic foster parent, community outreach manager for IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) Local 1647, and elected member of the Anchorage School Board. She stated that flat education funding since 2017, combined with rising inflation, has severely impacted Alaska's schools, leading to staffing shortages and limited student resources. She emphasized the importance of extracurricular activities and strong academics in preparing students for the workforce, particularly in skilled trades. She urged support for a \$1,000 increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA) to prevent further program cuts and to maintain class sizes, calling it a critical investment in Alaska's future workforce.

[5:33:54 PM](#)

KRISTINA VAN HOOGMOED, representing self, Kodiak, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is a former special education teacher in Kodiak who moved to Alaska in 2020 due to the respect shown by the Kodiak School District. She expressed concern over the district's current \$8 million deficit and the broader issue of funding not keeping pace with inflation. She criticized the argument that Alaska "can't afford" to fund schools, noting the contradiction of distributing large Permanent Fund Dividends while education remains underfunded. She urged the legislature to work together to fully fund public education and pass HB 69, stating that Alaskans can solve tough challenges when committed.

[5:36:02 PM](#)

TRACY SCHAFFER, representing self, Kotzebue, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 and emphasized the importance of school funding for students in remote villages who do not have access to school choice. She stated that village schools serve as the center of community life, providing both education and critical social-emotional support. She noted that retaining educators is vital for student success, especially when teachers return year after year. She attributed struggles in rural schools to flat funding since 2017, despite cost increases of up to 40 percent in some areas.

[5:37:34 PM](#)

ANDREA SCOTT, representing self, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in opposition to HB 69 with suggestions. She said she is a parent of students enrolled in CyberLynx, a statewide correspondence

program through the Nenana School District, and expressed concern about language in HB 69 that may restrict enrollment to a student's district of residence. The speaker emphasized that statewide correspondence programs have long provided essential educational choices for both rural and road system families. She warned that forcing students to switch programs would disrupt learning, affect rollover funds, and sever long-standing relationships with resource teachers. She urged the legislature to revise the bill's language to protect continued access to statewide correspondence schools and to avoid trade-offs that compromise student stability.

[5:39:59 PM](#)

BRIDGET MCBRIDE, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is a lifelong Alaskan and parent of school-age children. She acknowledged the importance of supporting all school types, including charter and correspondence programs but emphasized the critical need to fund neighborhood public schools that serve the most vulnerable students. She stated that inadequate funding threatens manageable class sizes, teacher retention, and educational opportunities. She expressed concern that continued underfunding may force her family to reconsider staying in Alaska, despite her own positive experience as an Anchorage School District graduate.

[5:41:38 PM](#)

ASHLEY MINAEI, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69. She said she is a lifelong Alaskan, Anchorage School District graduate, and parent of three young children. She and her husband, both public servants, returned to Alaska to raise their family in the strong, supportive community they experienced growing up—not for financial incentives like the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD). She emphasized that a well-funded education system is essential to building vibrant communities and retaining young professionals. She shared that even her mother, a retired award-winning teacher, would not choose to stay in Alaska under current conditions due to inadequate support for educators. She urged the legislature to invest in families and communities by fully funding public education through HB 69.

[5:44:06 PM](#)

RICK MORGAN, President, Mat-Su Classified Employees Association, Palmer, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with suggestions. He said the Mat-Su Classified Employees Association represents over 500 education support professionals in the Mat-Su Valley

and urged the committee to pass HB 69 with a \$1,000 increase to the BSA. He stated that years of flat funding amid rising costs have led to staff layoffs, program cuts, larger class sizes, and school closures, placing schools in crisis. He called for linking the BSA to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to prevent future shortfalls and recommended a 70-30 funding split to prioritize direct classroom support. He emphasized that Alaska has the resources to fund schools without sacrificing Permanent Fund Dividends (PFDs).

5:46:08 PM

WINTER MARSHALL-ALLEN, representing self, Homer, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with concerns. She said she is a special education teacher and expressed appreciation for amendments aimed at more equitable funding across all public education platforms. She stated that flat funding has had a direct impact on her ability to provide legally mandated special education services due to a lack of paraprofessional support and resources. She emphasized that quality education is a constitutional right in Alaska and called for solutions that make education funding inflation-proof. She voiced strong support for HB 69 and urged bipartisan collaboration to stabilize schools and support both teachers and education support professionals (ESPs) facing job insecurity.

5:48:29 PM

SHARON HOLLAND, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 with concerns. She said she is a longtime member of the charter school community at Aquarian Charter School in Anchorage, where she has served as a parent, paraprofessional, and currently as a teacher librarian. She described rising class sizes and staffing shortages and expressed support for the proposed \$1,000 increase to the BSA, noting it would help maintain manageable class sizes and support students and staff. She raised concerns about the proposed increase in indirect costs from 4 to 8 percent and suggested a phased implementation. She also requested revisions to the carryforward cap for charter schools, emphasizing the need to save for planned and unforeseen expenses such as facility repairs or natural disasters. She urged support for HB 69 with adjustments to the amendments she outlined.

5:50:47 PM

DIANA LEINBERGER, representing self, Fairbank, Alaska, testified in support of HB 69 and emphasized the legislature's constitutional obligation to maintain a system of public schools open to all children in Alaska. She stated that adequate

funding, including a meaningful increase to the BSA, is essential to meet this obligation. She shared that her daughter's school is closing, a result of ongoing tough decisions driven by stagnant funding rather than solely declining enrollment. She urged the legislature to pass HB 69 and implement a permanent BSA increase to sustain strong schools, communities, and the state's future.

[5:53:05 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN closed public testimony on HB 69.

[5:53:51 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN held HB 69 in committee.

[5:54:36 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 5:54 p.m.