

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

April 4, 2025

9:46 a.m.

9:46:21 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Hoffman called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 9:46 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Lyman Hoffman, Co-Chair
Senator Donny Olson, Co-Chair
Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair
Senator Mike Cronk
Senator James Kaufman
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Kelly Merrick

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Liz Harpold, Staff, Senator Donny Olson; Senator Bill Wielechowski, Sponsor; Lauren MacVay, President and CEO, True North Federal Credit Union; Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson, Sponsor; Kaye Roldan, Self, Juneau; Zander Kotlarov, Staff, Senator Gray-Jackson.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Ross Goble, Board Member, Junior Achievement Alaska; Tim Sullivan, Executive Director, Financial Reality Foundation; Katie Capozzi, President and Chief Executive Officer, Alaska Chamber of Commerce, Anchorage; Ray Ward, Self, Anchorage.

SUMMARY

SB 6 ASIAN AMERICAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER PROGRAM

SB 6 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 22 FINANCIAL LITERACY PROGRAM IN SCHOOLS

SB 22 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 146 REAA FUND: MT. EDGE CUMBE, TEACHER HOUSING

SB 146 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 56 APPROP: SUPPLEMENTAL; FUND CAP

HB 56 was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

Co-Chair Hoffman discussed the agenda.

[9:47:05 AM](#)

AT EASE

[9:47:53 AM](#)

RECONVENED

#sb146

SENATE BILL NO. 146

"An Act relating to the regional educational attendance area and small municipal school district fund; relating to Mt. Edgecumbe High School; and relating to teacher housing."

[9:48:02 AM](#)

Co-Chair Hoffman invited Liz Harpold to the table.

[9:48:16 AM](#)

LIZ HARPOLD, STAFF, SENATOR DONNY OLSON, relayed that SB 146 amended the Regional Education Attendance Area (REAA) fund language to include major maintenance and construction at Mount Edgecumbe High School and major maintenance for teacher housing, in REAA or small municipal areas, as allowable uses for the fund. Additionally, the bill removed the \$70 million cap on fund value, preventing any fund balance above the amount from lapsing into the general fund at the end of the year. The bill was previously introduced

as SB 113, and had passed the Senate but died in House Finance Committee.

[9:49:26 AM](#)

Co-Chair Hoffman OPENED public testimony.

[9:49:39 AM](#)

Co-Chair Hoffman CLOSED public testimony.

[9:49:46 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman commented that MEHS faced difficulty dealing with its maintenance. He considered that MEHS was the only school in the state that was put in with the overall state maintenance run through DOT&PF, which meant that the school had to compete with other state agencies for maintenance funding. He did not think there were maintenance advocates for the school. He said that when the committee had tried to fund some of the school's deferred maintenance in the past, the funds had been vetoed by the governor - the reason being that the school was not on the maintenance list. He contended that the school could not be on the major maintenance list and the bill would correct the matter. He could not speak to how the school would rank with other schools across the state but believed that the treatment of the school overall would be more equitable.

Co-Chair Stedman cited high levels of student performance at MEHS. He stressed that there were construction needs for teacher housing, new dormitories, and classroom spaces. He believed that the state could better serve the school.

[9:53:31 AM](#)

Senator Kiehl addressed a new fiscal note from the Department of Education and Early Development, OMB Component 2737. The department requested \$313.3 thousand and 2 new full-time positions in FY2026, which drops down to \$297.3 in the out years.

Senator Kiehl mentioned schools throughout the state that had student or teacher housing. He wondered whether the state could partner with Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) to find human resources to provide DEED with the residential design and construction expertise necessary,

rather than establishing new positions within the department.

Co-Chair Hoffman agreed.

SB 146 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#sb22

SENATE BILL NO. 22

"An Act establishing a financial literacy education program for public schools; and providing for an effective date."

9:56:06 AM

SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI, SPONSOR, related that the requirement could be incorporated into a number of different classes. He cited that Alaska had some of the worst FAFSA Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates in the country. He reported that Alaskans carried an average of \$8,000 in credit card debt. He noted that nationwide, 55 percent of people had less than \$1,000 in savings and only one-third could cover a \$400 expense comfortably. He thought it was incumbent upon Alaska's schools to teach budgeting and basic principles of money management.

Co-Chair Hoffman thought that the bill could apply to many of the financial issues currently facing the state.

9:58:40 AM

Senator Kaufman wondered why the bill had not been incorporated into other education reform legislation.

Senator Wielechowski relayed that he would certainly support the incorporation of the legislation into another education reform bill currently circulating through the legislature.

Senator Kaufman noticed the specificity in the bill and referenced page 2, line 22 which included "financial implications of being a member or a beneficiary of a Native Corporation," and wondered whether the language wasn't too specific.

Senator Wielechowski relayed that the provision had been added the previous year during the committee process. He said he was open to discussion about modification of the language.

[10:00:47 AM](#)

ROSS GOBLE, BOARD MEMBER, JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT ALASKA (via teleconference), offered strong support for the bill. He noted that over 50 percent of Alaska's youth felt underprepared to handle their financial lives into adulthood. He thought the bill offered a pro-active solution for educating Alaska's future on financial literacy and would provide them tools to navigate the financial world.

[10:03:07 AM](#)

TIM SULLIVAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FINANCIAL REALITY FOUNDATION (via teleconference), testified in support of the legislation. He noted that for the last 15 years, the Financial Reality Foundation had worked in high school to educate students on financial literacy. He looked forward to collaborating with the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) on the creating the curriculum.

[10:04:38 AM](#)

LAUREN MACVAY, PRESIDENT AND CEO, TRUE NORTH FEDERAL CREDIT UNION, spoke in ardent support of the legislation. She relayed that True North Federal Credit Union (TNFCU) had a webpage that included financial wellness but that the page was not sought by clients. She felt that the curriculum should be brought to people in order for them to engage and that putting the information in classrooms was highly effective. She stressed that talking about fundamental financial literacy would lead to a deeper curiosity and understanding of financial education.

[10:07:19 AM](#)

Co-Chair Hoffman OPENED public testimony.

[10:07:36 AM](#)

KATIE CAPOZZI, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, ALASKA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference),

spoke in support of the bill. She stated that introducing financial literacy to young people would benefit the whole of society. She noted that there were many free or low-cost resources to support financial education outlined in SB 22. She encouraged passage of the bill.

[10:09:56 AM](#)

Co-Chair Hoffman CLOSED public testimony.

Senator Kiehl addressed a fiscal note from Department of Education and Early Development, OMB Component 2796, which reflected a one-time cost of \$76,000 on FY2026.

Senator Wielechowski commented that the fiscal note could be significantly reduced.

SB 22 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#sb6

SENATE BILL NO. 6

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

[10:11:22 AM](#)

SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON, SPONSOR, offered a sponsor statement:

Senate Bill 6 requires schools in the State of Alaska to educate students on the history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders by our school system acknowledging historically accurate information by members of these communities, from the past and present.

This proposed piece of legislation aims to mandate the inclusion of the history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Alaska's public schools. By incorporating this critical component into our education system, we welcome a more informed society by teaching our students this important history of Alaska. The diverse history of these communities, including their significant contributions

to Alaska and the United States, deserve to be recognized and celebrated.

Senate Bill 6 will help to ensure that future generations of Alaskans have a comprehensive and accurate understanding of our state's history and the contributions of all its people.

Senator Gray-Jackson referenced a rise in discrimination and hate towards the Asian American and Pacific Islander community during the Covid-19 pandemic. She believed that the legislation would help to repair such behavior through information and education.

Senator Gray-Jackson continued that the bill was a step toward a more complete and accurate education for Alaska's students and strengthened the state's commitment to diversity, equity, and historical integrity.

[10:13:26 AM](#)

Senator Merrick noted that the bill established that school districts shall establish and provide to students in kindergarten through grade 12. She wondered whether the children would have the program every year.

Senator Gray-Jackson replied that each district shall establish a program for grades kindergarten through 12th.

[10:14:12 AM](#)

Senator Kaufman wondered whether the program could be included in another education reform bill and rely on the funding appropriated for that bill.

Senator Gray-Jackson noted that the bill had a zero fiscal note and would not require additional funding.

[10:15:13 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman wondered whether the historic contributions of other ethnic groups were taught in schools under statute.

Senator Gray-Jackson affirmed that the legislation would add education on Asian American and Pacific Islanders to what was already being taught in schools.

Co-Chair Stedman thought it would be nice if Norse history and culture was taught in schools.

[10:16:21 AM](#)

KAYE ROLDAN, SELF, JUNEAU, testified in support of the bill. She was a co-director of Make Us Visible Alaska, which was a non-profit that empowered local communities to integrate Asian American and Pacific Islander (API) contributions, experiences, and history in K-12 classrooms. She shared that the organization offered free materials for teaching API history in classrooms. She had been a Juneau resident for over 30 years and a student in the public school and university systems. She explained that, despite being part of a close-knit Filipino community in Juneau, she had not been taught about Filipino American history in her local schools or educational experiences. She shared that a college course was her first experience with learning Filipino American history. She believed that it was important that the curriculum be available to students K-12. She stressed that seeing your own culture reflected in the classroom gave student pride in their identity and empowered them to build positive self-images, which was crucial for student who might struggle with self-identity and self-worth. She added that the legislation would foster cross-cultural understanding and an alternative narrative to negative depictions of Asian Americans.

[10:20:37 AM](#)

Co-Chair Hoffman OPENED public testimony.

[10:20:48 AM](#)

RAY WARD, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. He thought it was of vital importance that the history of People of Color be included in school curriculum. He thanked the sponsor for her efforts. Mr. Ward shared a concern that that cultural and education materials would be restricted or removed from classrooms under the current federal administration. He worried that actions by the Trump Administration would lead to the downfall of education in the country.

[10:25:27 AM](#)

Co-Chair Hoffman CLOSED public testimony.

Senator Kiehl reviewed a zero fiscal note from the Department of Education and Early Development, OMB Component 2796.

Co-Chair Stedman wondered about what kind of burden the program would put on school districts both financially and timewise. He worried that there were ethnic groups that might be left out of history like the Russians, Japanese, Chinese, and Norse.

Senator Gray-Jackson relayed her staff would like to address Senator Stedman's comments.

[10:26:53 AM](#)

ZANDER KOTLAROV, STAFF, SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON, believed the bill was trying to address the lack of ethnic groups representation in historical teachings. He noted that the term Asian American and Pacific Islander encompassed a wide variety of ethnic groups and groups from all over the world that were not currently represented in history classes.

Senator Gray-Jackson asked whether the committee desired a review of the committee substitute.

Co-Chair Hoffman noted that the bells had rung, and floor session would soon be underway. He relayed that Co-Chair Olson's office would set the deadline for amendments.

SB 6 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#

ADJOURNMENT

[10:28:24 AM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 10:28 a.m.