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Member of the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties

The Honorable Lyman Hoffman
Senate Finance Subcommittee: DEED
Alaska State Legislature

February 10, 2021

Senator Hoffman,

We appreciate the Governor's inclusion of broadband assistance and Internet for Schools, which has been a priority of ours.

One of the concerns we would highlight for you is the impact this pandemic has had on school operations. Specifically, the mitigation efforts by school districts have contributed to Alaska's success in preserving healthcare capacity and flattening the curve, but districts are subsequently impacted by an annual count of students that is substantially down due to alternative schooling options necessary during a public health emergency. Additionally, schools have had substantially increased costs to operate, adapt, and deliver educational services under multiple models during the pandemic. Although COVID relief funds have helped cover some of those costs, many schools have had pay for the increased costs. We know that school operations will get back to normal, and that schools in FY22 will need access to the resources necessary to support full classrooms next fall. While the hold harmless provisions in statute reduce the impact, we believe the Legislature should go further. Please consider ways in which districts might have the prior year's ADM applied or otherwise developing a way to keep districts whole.

While you focus on the operating budget, we would commend to you a review of the School Construction and Major Maintenance grant program, and the consistency of State funding over time. We believe this to be deficient, resulting in an infrastructure deficit that compounds district operating costs. The less support the State provides to maintaining our schools, the more that districts have to apply their limited funding to operations and not instruction. As you are aware, a failure to maintain school infrastructure only results in more costly repairs later. We know that you have long been involved with the Alaska judicial system recognition of the State's obligation to schools, including in recent court rulings like the *Kasayulie* lawsuit.

We would request from this Subcommittee the addition of \$250,000 to allow the Department's Facilities Division to establish a Tracking Dashboard that would help decision-makers understand the condition of Alaska's schools. This dashboard would integrate multiple datasets and provide a clear picture of the needs we have for school construction and major maintenance.

Respectfully,

Nils Andreassen
Executive Director