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RURAL TEACHER HOUSING ACT

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

ON

S. 1905

TO PROVIDE HABITABLE QUARTERS FOR TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, OTHER SCHOOL STAFF, AND THEIR HOUSEHOLDS IN RURAL AREAS OF ALASKA LOCATED NEAR ALASKA NATIVE VILLAGES

MARCH 16, 2004
ANCHORAGE, AK

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RURAL TEACHER HOUSING ACT

TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2004

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS,
Anchorage, AK.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9 a.m. in Conference Room 2, First Floor, Alaska Native Medical Center, Anchorage, AK, Hon. Lisa Murkowski (acting chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senator Murkowski.

STATEMENT OF HON. LISA MURKOWSKI, U.S. SENATOR FROM ALASKA

Senator MURKOWSKI. As acting chairman of the U.S. Senate Indian Affairs Committee, I call this hearing to order.

This hearing is on S. 1905, the Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2003 which I introduced in the Senate late last year. I have invited a panel of witnesses from across the state to share their thoughts and personal experiences on this very important issue with me today. As we all know, rural school districts in our State face the challenge of recruiting and retaining teachers, administrators, and other school staff due to the lack of housing in many of our rural communities. For example, 1 year in the Lower Kuskokwim School District they hired one teacher for every six who decided not to accept job offers.

One-half of the applicants decided not to accept a teaching position in that district based on the lack of housing. Last year when I traveled with U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, I wanted to have him see firsthand the challenge of educating our children in rural Alaska. At the village school in Savoonga we met with the principal who was living in a broom closet. We met the special education teacher who at the end of the day pulled a mattress out of a closet in her classroom and slept on the floor of the classroom there. The other teachers shared housing in a single home. So, needless to say, there is no room, there is no space for spouses, for families in many of our communities. And Savoonga, unfortunately, is not an isolated example.

We were able to make a tangible difference after our visit in Savoonga. As a result of something that we call the Alaska Project which is a Cabinet-level task force consisting of the Federal departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development, focused on interagency collaboration to address education, health, and housing challenges that face Alaska.

We were able to implement a short-term housing solution there in Savoonga along with our other partners, Denali Commission, State of Alaska, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, HUD, HHS, the Bering Strait School District, the city of Savoonga, Savoonga IRA Council and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. In working with all of these stake-holders, we secured an agreement that will allow the Bering Strait School District to use the former Savoonga clinic building to house teachers for a period of a couple years beginning last November. And with Denali Commission funding, we were able to renovate the clinic and teachers that were previously living in the Savoonga school are now temporarily housed in the renovated clinic.

I am also working on other initiatives to—to deal with the housing issues for our teachers. I have secured up to $10 million in the Denali Commission's fiscal year 2004 budget for teacher housing projects in rural communities. I am hopeful that a portion of that funding or any other available housing funding will also go not only to Savoonga to address the long-term challenge of teacher housing there, but to our other rural communities.

When we look at the example of Savoonga, we recognize again this is not just an isolated instance. What is happening in the other parts of rural Alaska, what can we do? And so this legislation that I've introduced, S. 1905, does address the Statewide problem. If we don't address the situation in terms of teacher housing, we really have no way to deal with the issue of recruitment and retention. Turnover in some of our rural areas is as high as 30 percent each year. And housing is truly a major factor, if not the number one factor, in that turnover rate. And as we are faced with the many challenges that present themselves with education, whether it's meeting the Federal requirements of No Child Left Behind, whether its declining State budgets that affect our education budget, we recognize that we must do something on this issue if we expect our children to get a good education. The only way they can get a good education is if we have good teachers. And if our good teachers are not willing to commit to a community because of inadequate housing, we haven't helped our kids.

So my bill authorizes the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide the teacher housing funds to AHFC. In turn, AHFC is authorized to provide grant and loan funds to the rural school districts in Alaska for teacher housing projects. This will allow the school districts to address the housing shortage through construction of units, purchasing units, leasing, rehabilitating, purchasing leased property, purchasing rehabilitated properties, repay loans secured for teacher housing projects, provide funding to fill any gaps not previously funded by loans or other forms of financing, and conduct any other activities normally related to construction. These activities are is an important part of it because these activities would include tasks such as connecting housing units to various utilities. You might be able to get the housing units out there, but if they're not hooked into the utilities it doesn't do us much good. It also would cover the preparation of construction sites and transporting all equipment and material necessary for the project to and from the construction or renovation site. And as all of you know who have spent any time in the rural

areas, this last component is very important because of the high transportation costs that are involved; getting the materials and equipment there is a huge undertaking. Eligible school districts that accept funds under this legislation will be required to provide the housing to teachers, administrators, other school staffs and members of their household.

In closing, it is imperative that we address this important issue immediately, and allow the flexibility for the disbursement of funds to be handled at the state level. The quality of education for our rural students is at stake, and this is why we have moved forward with, I feel, very, very important legislation. We have asked a select group of individuals to join us in presenting their testimony here today. There are two panels that we will hear from, but I will invite any who would like to submit written testimony to do so. We will keep the record open on this for an additional 2 weeks from today's hearing date. So if in fact you would like to submit additional testimony, please feel free to do so. We've asked our witnesses to limit their testimony to 5 minutes. If they would like to add more in written comment to be added to the record beyond that, they are certainly welcome to do that as well. If you are interested in submitting any testimony to the record, the committee aide for the Committee on Indian Affairs is with us, and we will make sure that you have that information so that you can give that to the appropriate individuals at the appropriate time.

[Text of S. 1905 follows:]

II

108TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1905

To provide habitable living quarters for teachers, administrators, other school staff, and their households in rural areas of Alaska located in or near Alaska Native Villages.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

NOVEMBER 20, 2003

Ms. MURKOWSKI (for herself and Mr. CAMPBELL) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs

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A BILL

To provide habitable living quarters for teachers, administrators, other school staff, and their households in rural areas of Alaska located in or near Alaska Native Villages.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2003''.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds that—

(1) housing for teachers, administrators, other school staff, and their households in remote and

rural areas of Alaska is often substandard, if available at all;

(2) as a consequence, teachers, administrators, other school staff, and their households are often forced to find alternate shelter, sometimes even in school buildings; and

(3) rural school districts in Alaska are facing increased challenges, including meeting the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act, in recruiting employees due to the lack of affordable, quality housing.

(b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this Act is to provide habitable living quarters for teachers, administrators, other school staff, and their households in rural areas of Alaska located in or near Alaska Native Villages.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act, the following definitions shall apply:

(1) ALASKA HOUSING FINANCE CORPORATION.—The term ''Alaska Housing Finance Corporation'' means the State housing authority for the State of Alaska, created under the laws of the State of Alaska, or any successor thereto.

(2) ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.—The term ''elementary school'' has the meaning given that term in sec-

tion 9101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7801).

(3) ELIGIBLE SCHOOL DISTRICT.—The term ''eligible school district'' means a public school district (as defined under the laws of the State of Alaska) located in the State of Alaska that operates one or more schools in a qualified community.

(4) NATIVE VILLAGE.—The term ''Native Village''—

(A) has the meaning given that term in section 3 of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (43 U.S.C 1602); and

(B) includes the Metlakatla Indian Community of the Annette Islands Reserve.

(5) OTHER SCHOOL STAFF.—The term ''other school staff'' means pupil services personnel, librarians, career guidance and counseling personnel, education aides, and other instructional and administrative school personnel.

(6) QUALIFIED COMMUNITY.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The term ''qualified community'' means a home rule or general law city incorporated under the laws of the State of Alaska, or an unincorporated community (as defined under the laws of the State of Alaska)

in the State of Alaska situated outside the limits of such a city, with respect to which, the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation has determined that the city or unincorporated community—

(i) has a population of 6,500 or fewer individuals;

(ii) is situated within or near a Native Village, as determined by the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation; and

(iii) is not connected by road or railroad to the municipality of Anchorage, Alaska.

(B) CONNECTED BY ROAD.—In this paragraph, the term ''connected by road'' does not include a connection by way of the Alaska Marine Highway System, created under the laws of the State of Alaska, or a connection that requires travel by road through Canada.

(7) SECONDARY SCHOOL.—The term ''secondary school'' has the meaning given that term in section 9101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7801).

(8) SECRETARY.—The term ''Secretary'' means the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

(9) TEACHER.—The term ''teacher'' means an individual who is employed as a teacher in a public elementary or secondary school, and meets the teaching certification or licensure requirements of the State of Alaska.

(10) TRIBALLY DESIGNATED HOUSING ENTITY.—The term ''tribally designated housing entity'' has the meaning given that term in section 4 of the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1996 (25 U.S.C. 4103).

(11) VILLAGE CORPORATION.—The term ''Village Corporation'' has the meaning given that term in section 3 of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (43 U.S.C. 1602), and includes urban and group corporations, as defined in that section.

SEC. 4. RURAL TEACHER HOUSING PROGRAM.

(a) GRANTS AND LOANS AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary shall provide funds to the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation in accordance with the regulations promulgated under section 5, to be used as provided under subsection (b).

(b) USE OF FUNDS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Funds received pursuant to subsection (a) shall be used by the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation to make grants or loans to eli-

gible school districts, to be used as provided in paragraph (2).

(2) USE OF FUNDS BY ELIGIBLE SCHOOL DISTRICTS.—Grants or loans received by an eligible school district pursuant to paragraph (1) shall be used for—

(A) the construction of new housing units within a qualified community;

(B) the purchase and rehabilitation of existing structures to be used as housing units within a qualified community;

(C) the rehabilitation of housing units within a qualified community;

(D) the leasing of housing units within a qualified community;

(E) purchasing or leasing real property on which housing units will be constructed, purchased, or rehabilitated within a qualified community;

(F) the repayment of a loan used for the purposes of constructing, purchasing, or rehabilitating housing units, or for purchasing real property on which housing units will be constructed, purchased, or rehabilitated, within a

qualified community, or any activity under subparagraph (G);

(G) any other activities normally associated with the construction, purchase, or rehabilitation of housing units within a qualified community, including—

(i) connecting housing units to various utilities;

(ii) preparation of construction sites;

(iii) transporting all equipment and materials necessary for the construction or rehabilitation of housing units to and from the site on which such housing units exist or will be constructed; and

(iv) environmental assessment and remediation of construction sites or sites where housing units exist; and

(H) the funding of any remaining costs for the construction, purchase, or rehabilitation of housing units within a qualified community, the purchase of real property within a qualified community, or any activity listed under subparagraph (G) that is not financed by loans or other sources of funding.

(c) OWNERSHIP OF HOUSING AND LAND.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—All housing units constructed, purchased, or rehabilitated, or real property purchased, with grant or loan funds provided under this Act, or with respect to which funds under this Act have been expended, shall be owned by the relevant eligible school district, municipality (as defined under the laws of the State of Alaska), Village Corporation, the Metlakatla Indian Community of the Annette Islands Reserve, or a tribally designated housing entity. Ownership of housing units and real property may be transferred between such entities.

(d) OCCUPANCY OF HOUSING UNITS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided under paragraphs (2) and (3), each housing unit constructed, purchased, rehabilitated, or leased with grant or loan funds under this Act, or with respect to which funds awarded under this Act have been expended, shall be provided to teachers, administrators, other school staff, and members of their households.

(2) NON-SESSION MONTHS.—A housing unit constructed, purchased, rehabilitated, or leased with grant or loan funds under this Act, or with respect to which funds awarded under this Act have been expended, may be occupied by individuals other than

teachers, administrators, other school staff, or members of their household, only during those times in which school is not in session.

(3) TEMPORARY OCCUPANTS.—A vacant housing unit constructed, purchased, rehabilitated, or leased with grant or loan funds under this Act, or with respect to which funds awarded under this Act have been expended, may be occupied by a contractor or guest of an eligible school district for a maximum period of time, to be determined by the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation.

(e) COMPLIANCE WITH LAW.—Each eligible school district receiving a grant or loan under this Act shall ensure that all housing units constructed, purchased, rehabilitated, or leased with such grant or loan funds, or with respect to which funds awarded under this Act have been expended, meet all applicable laws, regulations, and ordinances.

(f) PROGRAM POLICIES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, after consulting with eligible school districts, shall establish policies governing the administration of grant and loan funds made available under this Act. Such policies shall include a methodology for ensuring that funds provided under

this Act are made available on an equitable basis to eligible school districts.

(2) REVISIONS.—Not less than every 3 years, the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation shall, in consultation with eligible school districts, consider revisions to the policies established under paragraph (1).

SEC. 5. REGULATIONS.

Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall promulgate such regulations as are necessary to carry out this Act.

SEC. 6. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—There are authorized to be appropriated to the Department of Housing and Urban Development such sums as are necessary for each of the fiscal years 2005 through 2014, to carry out this Act.

(b) LIMITATION.—The Secretary and the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation shall each use not more than 5 percent of the funds appropriated in any fiscal year to carry out this Act for administrative expenses associated with the implementation of this Act.

○

Senator MURKOWSKI. So, at this time I would like to invite those on panel 1 to join me at the table. Peggy Cole is a teacher and NEA member from Emmonak School in the Lower Yukon School District, Jennifer Davis, the Itinerant Technology Trainer, NEA Alaska member is, associated with the Northwest Arctic Borough School District up in Kotzebue, and Christopher Simon, is the superintendent of the Yukon-Koyukuk School District out of Fairbanks, AK. So if the three of you can just join us up front here, please.

Ms. Cole, if we can begin the testimony with you. Welcome, and I am pleased to have you with the committee this morning.

STATEMENT OF PEGGY COLE, TEACHER AND NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION—ALASKA MEMBER, EMMONAK SCHOOL, LOWER YUKON SCHOOL DISTRICT, EMMONAK, AK

Ms. COLE. Thank you, Senator Murkowski. My name is Peggy Cole and I'm a teacher in the Lower Yukon School District [LYSD], located in western Alaska. Our school district consists of 11 sites spread along the Yukon River and the Bering seacoast covering approximately 22,000 square miles. We have 2,039 students, 99 percent of which are Yupik Eskimo. I have taught in LYSD for 12 years and have lived in teacher housing during that time. My family and I have lived in three villages in our school district. At each site, we have lived in BIA housing units, which are about 50 or more years old with very little maintenance throughout those 50 years. They have many problems and are in need of costly repairs. In the villages in which we live, we are required by contract to live in the teacher housing that is provided by the school district, and they pickup the cost of utilities and water and sewer and we pay a rent to the school district which comes directly out of our salary. So in many cases, it looks to people like we make a very large salary, but when you start deducting our rent from that salary and 5 percent of our salary to boot, it gets to be quite a bit of money. We were able, at our last negotiations, to negotiate out the 5 percent because it was penalizing our higher paid and more experienced teachers and they were leaving the district because it was costing them so much. So we were able to get that out of our contract. And right at this point, our housing rent is fairly low but—that's going to change in another year when we have to go back to the table. They've already told us they plan to up the rent. In our villages there are virtually no houses available to rent, and what is available would be considered to be very substandard by most people. In the villages the housing that the people live in themselves is substandard. They're open around the bottom. They're very cold. Many of them do not have running water. They do not have adequate sewage, transportation back and forth. Many of the villages still have what we call "honey buckets" which means there is no sewage in the house. You have to take your bucket and empty it. And there are—fortunately, in our District, no teachers living in that condition, but if we were to try to rent from the communities we would have that type of housing in some communities. The cost of living in rural Alaska is very high compared to Anchorage. And a very simple example is that milk in Anchorage costs about $3.50 a gallon, whereas in rural Alaska and the village that

I'm from it's $9 a gallon, and it's not always available. Supplies of all types have to be flown into the village during the year, or barged-in during the summer months. There are no roads connecting western Alaska to a hub where supplies can be purchased. And I think that this might be really important for people that don't live in Alaska to fully understand our condition, that we have to fly in to our village. We can't drive there. There are no choices for us as far as supplies or places to live. When you're in the village or flown into the village, that's where you stay until you decide to fly out at Christmas possibly, or in the summertime. So there's very little available.

While working in our school district, I have had the opportunity, as the president of our local association, to visit many of our teacher housing units. We have 104 in our school district. In the last 12 years there have been only eight new buildings constructed, new units. During the summer of 1996, as a cost saving measure, our District purchased three mobile homes and barged them to Hooper Bay to act as teacher housing. Well, that didn't work at all because when they set them up on foundations, they came apart and the walls cracked and there were many, many water and sewer problems. And our school district does want to keep the rent at a reasonable price in order to attract and retain quality teachers which will provide stability in our classroom, but building new houses in rural Alaska is extremely costly. So last summer, the summer of 2003 as a "Band-Aid" to our problem, the District spent $1 million from their capital improvements fund in order to upgrade our existing housing throughout the District. And these upgrades have helped to make the houses look better aesthetically, you know, you look at them, oh gee, they're painted on the outside for the first time in 50 years and some of them have some new carpet and new paint on the walls. But the underlying issues with water and sewer, electrical, structural have not been solved. In fact, in my own housing unit where I live in Emmonak, our power went out at Christmas 2002. We lost all the meat in our freezer. They came out and there was some problem underground which they couldn't fix because the ground was frozen, so they hay-wired our house across to the old BIA school building, and it remained that way, they were supposed to fix it this summer. It was never fixed. So we're still hay-wired and now weekly our electricity goes off. We have to call the principal. They have to go over and flip a switch in the old school. And the switch is like a 70 amp fuse and our house is over 200 amps, so it doesn't work. It's not been repaired. And to me, it's dangerous. You know, the house could burn down, and we have issues like that all over our school district. At some sites our single teachers are required to live together because of the scarcity of adequate housing units. That does not promote stability in our teaching staffs. Because many teachers don't want to be dropped into a situation where you have to live with a total stranger. People are unhappy. They don't get along. Some teachers have been known to move out of their housing unit and go live in their classroom because they could not get along with this total stranger that is living with them.

The bill that Senator Murkowski has introduced would be an awesome bill if we could get it passed because it would certainly

help our local school districts find the funding that they need to build the housing in the school district for the teachers in order to retain quality teachers. It would also provide jobs for our local people because they would help with the construction, so that—the communities would be very accepting of that because it would give them an income into their households. So with the added stress to the budget of the new NCLB law and the increase to our PERS and TERS and the increasing cost of insurance, in our school district there is no money available. S. 1905, the Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2003, which Senator Murkowski is sponsoring, would make moneys available to these rural districts, like LYSD. This money would allow our district to build new teacher housing units, which would help to entice teachers to come to rural Alaska to work. The passage of this bill would also allow the district to get the needed money to bring all of our housing units up to the rigid standards of today's world. I strongly encourage you to support Senator Murkowski in her efforts to get S. 1905 passed.

Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Ms. Cole appears in appendix.]

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Ms. Cole. I appreciate your testimony.

Ms. Davis.

STATEMENT OF JENNIFER DAVIS, ITINERANT TECHNOLOGY TRAINER AND NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION—ALASKA MEMBER, NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT, KOTZEBUE, AK

Ms. DAVIS. Thank you, Senator Murkowski. I work as an itinerant technology trainer for my school district, and that means a morning commute of one-half hour to 1 hour on a bush plane as I travel through the 11 villages in our district. And, they vary in size from about 100 people to 3,000 in our hub community, Kotzebue, where I live. There are no roads connecting these communities, and our school district is about 37,000 square miles or approximately the size of Indiana. In Kotzebue where I live, there is no school district provided housing. Everyone is required to locate their own housing in the community and then pay extremely high costs for what many consider to be substandard conditions. I live in a 250-square foot apartment or approximately one-fifth of the size of this room, and I pay $1,050 a month in rent. I actually feel very lucky that I was able to find an apartment that is clean and comfortable even though it is very small. There is a shortage of housing in Kotzebue, so people will take anything they can find, sight unseen, over the phone when they move there. Which is what I did. I spoke to two other new teachers on the phone before moving to Kotzebue and we arranged to live together in order to save money, and moved into a so-called furnished apartment that had one couch, one bed in a three bedroom, and we each paid $800 a month. The place was filthy and sinking into the permafrost on one side, so we had everything roll across the apartment. After 1 year of living like that, I did not think I would stay in Kotzebue, but luckily I moved into my current housing, and as I said, it is comfortable.

So I have made it my home. And housing, if it's not comfortable, you can't make it your home, and that's why we lose so many teachers. It's not home to them. As I travel around to all of the villages in my district, I do stay with teachers. There are no hotels and so I'm on couches and floors in other teacher housing and I get to see all of it. It varies greatly from site to site. We have many teachers who have to lease from the community and those places are not kept up. Many have "honey buckets", no running water, no sewer, and you empty the bucket. Very high costs of housing also. The school district has provided housing in most of the communities and it is subsidized. But the quality is very substandard. Places would be condemned in many parts of the country. Every fall they get overrun by shrews, they're called little rodents, into the housing. In villages that will allow it, the teachers will try to purchase housing. Occasionally they can make a plea to the regional IRA council and ask if they can lease, since they cannot buy land to build housing on. We have teachers who would love to make our communities home, but housing is such an issue that they chose to leave and go somewhere where they can own or build a house. There is the housing that we do have, the district housing, which is in such need of renovations and repairs. Teachers report unsafe living conditions in or around their apartment, lacking in maintenance. We had a teacher injured this year because of a leak in her ceiling that had been there for about 1½ years, unrepaired, and she slipped and fell and shattered her ankle. Some of our teachers have to haul their own water and oil for their housing. That takes up time away from their students and their classroom. I think that the Rural Teacher Housing Act would help our district and districts across the state, in attracting and retaining quality teachers and educators. We currently have about a 30-percent turnover every year of our teaching staff, and the conditions and the cost of our housing is one of the main reasons that people leave. Every year I think about signing my contract and create a list of why I want to stay and why I would choose to leave. And at the top of my list, and it is often the only reason that I would leave, is my housing. This act would make it possible for the district to build and provide housing for Kotzebue teachers. We don't have any district housing, and it would allow people to feel able to make it their home, to make Kotzebue home. I would love to stay there long-term, but I don't know if I can with the current housing situation. Most of our villages need more housing to be built. There is not enough. You've got teachers in a two-bedroom with four people who did not know each other prior to living there, sharing rooms, living in their classrooms. Our villages need more housing and for serious renovations to be made. Many educators move to Northwest Arctic with the intent of making it their home but don't feel they have adequate, comfortable, affordable housing. The high teacher turnover that we currently have is hard on the children in the region and I think anything we can do to improve teacher retention will benefit our students and our kids. I think that this bill is a step in the right direction. Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Ms. Davis appears in appendix.]

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you.

Mr. Simon, good morning.

STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER SIMON, SUPERINTENDENT, YUKON-KOYUKUK SCHOOL DISTRICT, FAIRBANKS, AK

Mr. SIMON. Good morning, Senator. Thank you for your interest and involvement in education issues in rural Alaska and for working to address our concerns related to teacher housing. I welcome the opportunity to provide support for S. 1905 and share experiences of providing teacher housing with you. The Yukon-Koyukuk School District covers the Western interior of Alaska, an area of 65,000 square miles. Geographically, the district is larger than the State of Washington. Our schools serve nine villages of about 1,650 people with 430 school-aged children in grades K–12. More than 90 percent of the students are Koyukon or Tanana Athabaskan Indians. Except for Manley and Minto, travel to and from our schools is by scheduled commuter or charter air service. Raven correspondence School is a Statewide correspondence program, which embraces 1,399 students and their families. Y–KSD employs 64 certified teachers, administrators and specialists, most of whom are endorsed in their field of placement. According to standardized test scores over the last 13 years, the students at our village sites performed between the 18th and 40th percentile. Over the last 5 years, there has been an increase in the scores, which are currently sitting between the 30th and 40th percentile. Under No Child Left Behind, each school is to meet Adequate Yearly Progress or eventually face sanctions. At this point, four of our five village sites meet AYP, four schools are at AYP Level I, and one is at AYP Level II. In order to provide a sound education, attain better test results to meet AYP and increase students' test scores, all rural schools need outstanding teachers and principals. One of our biggest obstacles in providing a sound education is teacher and principal turnover. Between this year and last year, Y–KSD had a 29-percent turnover in teachers and a 44-percent turnover in principals. Three teachers and one school counselor left one or more of our communities since school started in August. Studies have shown that hiring teachers with three to five years of experience pays the biggest dividends in the classroom. What we have now is rural districts hiring young teachers who stay 2 to 4 years then leave to find employment in an urban district or one that is connected by the road system. We are, in fact, training teachers. Yet we are the ones who need experienced, dedicated teachers for the children under our care. One of the first questions an interested teacher or principals asks is "Is housing provided? And if so, what is the rent?" Not long afterward is the question: "Do I have to share housing?" Adequate teacher housing is vital to the success of our students. And unfortunately, the choice of spending scarce resources for classroom equipment and supplies or for teacher housing is something we face every year. Y–KSD would rather not be in the business of teacher housing because it is being operated at a loss.

Ten years ago, Y–KSD gave one-half of its teacher housing to a village corporation free of charge. Last summer, this same corporation gave the last housing unit back to the district. Providing housing is a time-consuming and financial burden to any organization. However, Y–KSD provides this service at a loss so quality teachers may be hired to teach the children of this district. The issue of substandard teacher housing is raised in this bill. Yes, this is an issue

this district faces. Two years ago, Y–KSD provided a rental free-of-charge to a couple and their two young children. This district did not want to be held responsible if any harm came to this young family due to the condition of the building. Currently, two teachers are renting a duplex that is 29 years old and very inefficient. The estimated operational cost is $247,000 over the next 6 years; 4 years ago, in another village, Y–KSD purchased a house which included a storage shed. This same shed had been converted to a housing unit; 3 years ago, a young man and his daughter lived in the school for 2 months before finding a local house to rent. Y–K has been trying to meet the housing needs of its teachers. But in doing so, it takes funds and maintenance time away from the schools. Since 2000, Y–KSD spent $702,138 on housing instead of the classroom. The cost of constructing a two-bedroom, one-bathroom house in 2002 was $169,000. Included in this cost is the purchase price of $99,677 and $69,992 for freight, construction, and utility hook-ups. An estimated 17 rental units in 6 communities are required to meet our teacher housing needs in the next few years. YKSD simply does not have the amount of funds necessary to build housing. In closing, teacher housing is a necessity for rural districts, usually operated at a loss and takes scarce resources away from the school. Any assistance that you may provide would be greatly appreciated. And again, thank you again for your interest and concern.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Simon appears in appendix.]

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Simon. Before we go into the next panel, I've just got a few questions to ask the first panelists. Ms. Cole, you were talking about the rent costs. You indicated that the district was trying to keep the rental costs down low and in fact there was some discussion about renegotiation next year. What do you pay for rent right now?

Ms. COLE. In the unit that my husband and I presently occupy which is a small two bedroom unit with our 10-year-old daughter, we pay approximately $600 a month. That is down from over $1000 a month that we were paying a couple of years ago for the same substandard BIA housing.

Senator MURKOWSKI. And then you indicated that you have lived in or you taught in three other schools within the district, can you just real briefly describe other housing situations that you and your family have lived in in those communities.

Ms. COLE. Yes; we first came to Lower Yukon School District in 1992, we lived in the village of Hooper Bay which is a large—one of the largest Eskimo villages, out on the Bering Seacoast. There is no running water. No sewer in any of the homes. The only place where that is, is in the school. We lived in an old BIA building that had been the original school in Hooper Bay 50 years ago, and had been remodeled into a housing unit. It was—we had two children and my mother living with us at the time. The house was roomy but had many, many problems as far as sewer and lighting, the floors were rotted and things like this. The windows were rotted. But the space was okay. We moved from there to Mountain Village. We had adopted a baby in Hooper Bay so we had a 2-year-old when we left Hooper Bay, and our two daughters, and my mother was our live-in baby-sitter. We moved into a unit in Mountain Village

which was a very small two bedroom unit. The bedrooms were maybe 10 x 11, and there was not enough room for my mother and my baby daughter, so my mother lived in the pantry with all the shelves removed and no window. And our baby daughter lived in the bedroom with us and we were wall-to-wall beds. There was no storage in the unit at all. It was one of the larger units in Mountain Village. When we arrived, it had many problems. The porch was rotted. There was no railing. It was 8 feet off the ground. There was a hole in the bathroom floor with open sewer running under of which we were not aware. The feet of my three children were that close. When they repaired it, the superintendent came with many apologies that we had had to live that way for 3 years. From there we moved to Emmonak where we live now. And that's the two bedroom old BIA unit also with the electrical problems.

Senator MURKOWSKI. You mentioned in addition to the high cost of rent that you deal with, is just the high cost of living out in any of the rural communities, you mentioned the price of milk, that's always my judge in the rural versus urban cost as I'm looking at milk, but the other thing I think many people outside the State of Alaska don't recognize is the transportation costs that you live with because we're not connected by a road system. And in order to go to town, whether town is described as Fairbanks or Anchorage, you've got to get either on a jet, if you're lucky enough, or you have to fly, in your case, from Emmonak into—I don't know where you go, down to Bethel?

Ms. COLE. No; my husband and I can fly—Emmonak is one of our only villages that has a direct flight to Anchorage, but it's a 9-seat twin prop airplane.

Senator MURKOWSKI. And what would you pay to fly into Anchorage?

Ms. COLE. We pay $600 approximately, round-trip, for each one of us. So if we come in for anything as a family, it's $1,800 for a trip.

Senator MURKOWSKI. These are the add-ons that people, unfortunately, don't get. They don't appreciate the additional costs that we experience. You had also indicated in your testimony that there in, and I don't know whether it was just in Emmonak or whether it's within the whole district, that there have been some substantial upgrades made within the past year, and I think you used the term, this was a mandate, a cosmetic upgrade in terms of the paint, perhaps carpeting, but how long has it been since the district has been able to do what you would consider substantive upgrades to the facilities—to the homes in the district?

Ms. COLE. Personally, I have been here 12 years and I have never seen anything done until this last summer. And having spoken to people that have been out there, and we do have some diehards that have been there 20 years in the same district, this is the first time they have ever had any maintenance done on the housing, major maintenance. And it came out of our negotiations because we told them we're paying—they were requiring us to pay 5 percent of our salary plus a base rent for different units which were classified anywhere from A–E, "E" being maybe a one bedroom about the size of Jennifer's, if that big."A" being maybe a couple of bedrooms and maybe not as old as the others. And we paid

5 percent of our salary, and our complaint was, the more you make, the more you pay. And so let's see something for this. We want the 5 percent gone and we want some housing fixed. So as a result of our negotiations, our superintendent who was new to our district at that time, the following year after negotiations we flew around to visit all the housing units and notes were made as to what needed to be done. They coughed up $1 million, which sounds like a lot of money, but when you spread it out between 104 units it's not a lot of money. And that came right out of their funds, though. That was out of their capital improvement funds. So, you know, having money from the—from some other source would really, really help to maintain that housing and upgrade.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you. I appreciate your responses. Ms. Davis, you've indicated that you have been in Kotzebue now for 5 years, where were you living before you arrived in Kotzebue?

Ms. DAVIS. I was in Washington State teaching.

Senator MURKOWSKI. So, you're not a native of Alaska then?

Ms. DAVIS. No.

Senator MURKOWSKI. So you came to Alaska looking to come and teach? Your first assignment was in Kotzebue?

Ms. DAVIS. Yes.

Senator MURKOWSKI. And your first housing in Kotzebue then was this kind of boarding house arrangement you've described?

Ms. DAVIS. Yes; I arranged—when new hires come up to the district for Kotzebue they are mailed a list of all of the other new hires, and all of the available potential housing in Kotzebue, which is through the community, and everything is arranged over the phone. The year that I was hired there were no other single women, so my roommates were two young men. We shared a two-bedroom. They had one room, I had the other. As I said, it was in very poor condition. We boarded up one of the windows. It had a hole in one of the floors. It was very dirty. It was sinking into the permafrost.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Had you ever lived in conditions like this?

Ms. DAVIS. No.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Did it cause you to wonder what you were doing in Kotzebue?

Ms. DAVIS. Yes; it did. I grew up on an Indian reservation in Washington. My parents teach. It was very similar. When I called home for the first time I said it looks just like the Indian housing projects. My parents said, well, the difference is we don't live there anymore. We don't have to live there. We can move outside of town and commute in. You can't do that.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Now, Kotzebue's situation is different than some of the others that we have heard in that you have to find your own housing.

Ms. DAVIS. Yes.

Senator MURKOWSKI. What happens if you are unable to find housing? We know that at certain times housing is just not available. What do other teachers do?

Ms. DAVIS. I had a teacher living on my floor for 1 month while he looked for a place to live. Others will share housing units temporarily. We have one teacher in Kotzebue who has been there now 2 years. His family lives in Anchorage. He would like them to come

up, but he can't find a place to live for his entire family. He is living with two other teachers.

Senator MURKOWSKI. You have also indicated in your testimony that your job allows you to travel throughout the district and you mentioned there are no hotels and so you do kind of camp out wherever you can in the communities, so you probably have gotten quite a good firsthand view of what is available at least in the region in which you're teaching, does anybody have adequate housing up there in your opinion?

Ms. DAVIS. There is in Noorvik which just got a new school building. The old elementary school is converted into housing. The teachers there describe it as dormitory style. There is one door and they go down the hallway of the old school and the old classrooms are now—they are housing units.

Senator MURKOWSKI. How many live there?

Ms. DAVIS. Eight apartments, some are couples. But it is clean, new housing.

Senator MURKOWSKI. And as you talk with new teachers, teachers such as yourself 5 years ago just coming to the State, what is their reaction? What is their response when they see the conditions that they are expected to live in?

Ms. DAVIS. Of the approximately 60 teachers who were hired the same year as me, there are 8 still in the district. The majority of those left—out of the teachers in Kotzebue there are two of us still in the district.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Where have the others gone? Are they still in the State?

Ms. DAVIS. Many have gone to other districts in the State and to the road system. Most have left the State.

Senator MURKOWSKI. And is there a universal reason that they leave?

Ms. DAVIS. The district does a survey, an exit survey when people leave and prior to coming down to this meeting I asked for the surveys from the district and almost every single person, housing was number one and number two on their list of reasons. The isolation being one of the others.

Senator MURKOWSKI. But do you feel as a, still a relatively new teacher coming to Alaska, that if we could do a better job of addressing the housing situation, we could do a better job of retaining our teachers?

Ms. DAVIS. Absolutely. As I said, my number one reason when I—when and if I choose to leave will be my housing situation and cost.

Senator MURKOWSKI. In the Kotzebue area have there been any new housing units for school employees?

Ms. DAVIS. No; there are none.

Senator MURKOWSKI. There are none. Okay, thank you. Mr. Simon, in the Yukon-Koyokuk school district, the district itself, the district owns the housing units, is that correct?

Mr. SIMON. In 8 of the 9 villages.

Senator MURKOWSKI. How many units does the district own?

Mr. SIMON. Altogether the district owns 26 housing units and leases 2 from community members.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay. And do you have any villages in the district that do not have housing for your school employees? Situations similar to Kotzebue?

Mr. SIMON. No.

Senator MURKOWSKI. So in terms of what you would need, in terms of actual units that you would need to accommodate your teachers in your district, what do you anticipate you would need?

Mr. SIMON. At this point I believe we would need 17 new houses.

Senator MURKOWSKI. You would need 17 new houses. And do you have any estimate as to what that would cost to construct those units?

Mr. SIMON. My best estimate would be around $2 million.

Senator MURKOWSKI. $2 million. Now, we've heard both Ms. Davis and Ms. Cole speak to the turnover rate, you've mentioned it yourself, not only the turnover rate among the teachers, but the turnover rate of the administrators, and that statistic is particularly troubling, I think you mentioned 44 percent of your principals moving on.

Mr. SIMON. Yes.

Senator MURKOWSKI. This is something that we don't talk about quite as much as the teachers, but the administrators is a huge, huge issue for us as well. And it seems to me that as a district you're really stuck with a dilemma. You would either put some of your education dollars into your housing so that you can keep your teachers, or you put the education money where we all think the education money should be and that's within the classroom. And you are really stuck with a very, very difficult choice. Because if you can't keep your teachers, you can't educate your kids. How do you wrestle with this? This is a terrible problem to be under.

Mr. SIMON. It's something that we have to deal with, we're going to budget again for next year and we have to figure out how much we're going to put into teacher housing and we are in the—you know, since there's so few teachers going to the Alaska Job Fair now-a-days, we have to be able to come to the table, to the teachers and say this is what we offer in terms of housing, and we know that they're going to be asking 54 other school districts in the State or this and that 30 about, what kind of housing do you provide? What is the rent? So we try to provide a cheaper rent and better housing and say yes, we have running water. That's just something——

Senator MURKOWSKI. But you think it's that, that gives you the competitive edge over other districts if you can say, I can offer you better housing at a lower price that you can get the teachers there?

Mr. SIMON. Absolutely. Better housing, lower price, and running water.

Senator MURKOWSKI. And running water. Pretty much the basics.

Mr. SIMON. Yes.

Senator MURKOWSKI. But what percentage, say for instance of next year's budget would you say that you've got to spend on teacher housing and as a consequence those moneys are not available within the classroom itself?

Mr. SIMON. Between 3 and 5 percent, $100,000 to $200,000.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay. I appreciate your comments this morning. Let's bring up the next group here.

I would like to welcome to the table, panel 2, Eric Madsen, director of rural program development, school of education, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Frank Hill, the co-director of Alaska Rural Systemic Initiatives, a program within the Alaska Federation of Natives and former superintendent of the Lake and Peninsula Borough School district, and Carl Rose who is the executive director of the Association of Alaska School Boards who is not with us this morning. His testimony has been presented and I am presuming it is at the back of the table. Nelson Angapak, who is the executive vice president of Alaska Federation of Natives is also with us this morning. Mr. Angapak, I understand that you will not be testifying, is that correct?

Mr. ANGAPAK. That's right.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay.

Mr. ANGAPAK. Mr. Hill will take care of that.

Senator MURKOWSKI. He'll take care of it, all right.

We understand that Mr. Rose is out sick this morning, so we will forgive him and accept his written comments. I should also note that we have received written testimony from Roger Sampson, the commissioner of the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, and David Bauer, former principal of Savoonga School in the Bering Straits School District. I understand that that testimony is also in the back if people are interested. We will wait for the cell phone to go off and then we'll begin.

[Prepared statements of Messrs. Rose, Samson, and Bauer appear in appendix.]

Senator MURKOWSKI. All right. Dr. Madsen, thank you for joining us this morning.

Your testimony, please.

STATEMENT OF ERIC MADSEN, DIRECTOR OF RURAL PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA, FAIRBANKS, AK

Mr. MADSEN. Thank you. For the record, my name is Eric Madsen. I am the director of Rural Program Development for the School of Education, University of Alaska, Fairbanks. My comments are based on periods of residency at St. Lawrence Island, on the Kuskokwim, and Northwest Arctic, and various professional travel working with students going back to 1977. Senator Murkowski, thank you for the opportunity to comment on S. 1905, the Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2003. These comments are predicated on the assumption that while the immediate issue before us is habitable living quarters for teachers, administrators, and other school staff, our larger goal is increasing the academic achievement of the students in the eligible communities. Certainly any measure that enhances rural Alaska school districts' ability to recruit and retain skilled teachers would be helpful toward that larger goal. However, I believe that improving teacher housing would be most constructive if it were placed in the context of a broader initiative. When Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867, schooling for Alaska Native students fell under the prevailing assimilationist paradigm which was exemplified in the 1819 Civilization Fund Act,

which had been established specifically for the purpose of "civilizing" Native American students in the Lower 48. That paradigm was extended to Alaska through practices such as delegating responsibility for schools in Native communities to missionary societies, and through policies such as the Nelson Act of 1905, which differentiated between students of mixed blood leading "civilized" lives and white students, on one hand, and students of mixed blood not leading "civilized" lives and Native students, on the other. In 30 years working with rural communities, I have rarely heard anyone suggest that teachers from outside those communities are not necessary and helpful components of strong, well-rounded academic programs. But if our goal is only to make teachers from outside rural communities somewhat more physically comfortable so that we can extend their tenure by a couple of years, I believe we run the risk of being perceived as doing little more than perpetuating the assimilationist paradigm to yet another generation of rural students, and I know that is not the intent of this bill at all. In contrast, linking such an initiative to the larger issues would support rural communities' efforts to develop the kinds of schools that reflect their values and their aspirations. I think there are several ways to approach this task. First, while providing funds and a funding mechanism to improve housing for rural teachers would be a constructive step, it should be implemented within a context of improving housing and public facilities in rural communities, in general, to the extent those communities so desire. Absent this broader context, long-term residents of rural communities might reasonably ask why teacher housing should be any better, or any more of a priority, than housing for those who live there full-time. Second, in order to improve the overall quality of students' school experiences and their academic achievement, I would suggest directing a portion of the available funds toward improving teacher housing, to help respond to immediate needs, and a larger portion toward assisting long-term residents to become fully certified, highly qualified teachers in their home communities which would help to address the larger goal. Long-term residents have deep understanding of their communities, their schools, and their students, and many of them have years of experience in teaching and teaching assistance roles. Not incidentally, residents of rural communities also have their own housing. As my colleague Dean Norris-Tull observed in a conversation about this topic last week, supporting rural residents' aspirations to become educators in their home communities simultaneously addresses, in a very real way, both the housing issues and the larger successful school experience issues. There are several forms that such assistance might take. The most direct approach would be to make academic scholarships available directly to long-term residents, contingent only upon satisfactory progress through a teacher preparation program. A second, and perhaps companion, form of support would be to fund release-time from work so that students who already serve in teaching assistance roles could remain close to their classrooms while completing their preparation programs. Third, I would urge you to pursue the improvement of teacher housing, but to consider doing so within the context of improving rural housing, in general. The funding mechanisms to support teachers in training and rural

housing improvement are already contemplated in S. 1905: that is, tribally designated entities and village corporations for the scholarships and housing initiatives, and school districts for release time funding. S. 1905's intent to provide habitable living quarters for rural teachers is a constructive step. Teachers play critical roles in the lives of students, and teachers who stay in rural communities long enough to become participants in community life and to better understand and appreciate their students are much more likely to fulfill their roles effectively. They deserve, and doubtless would appreciate, safe, comfortable, functional housing. That said, long-term residents of rural communities also deserve and would appreciate safe, comfortable, functional housing. Perhaps more to the point, rural students deserve teachers who have deep understanding of, and long-term commitment to their communities. Certainly this includes the large number of teachers who grew up and trained elsewhere, but have found rural communities to be personally satisfying and professionally rewarding places to live, to work, and to raise their families as we've heard today. There are many of them, and their personal contributions to rural villages and their professional contributions to rural schools are significant and certainly must be appreciated. Nevertheless, the roughly 100-year history of public schooling in Alaska suggests that it is most frequently the residents of rural communities who provide both the continuity in those schools, and also the orientation and the nurturing that help new teachers from outside become long-term, contributing participants in those settings. I encourage you, Senator Murkowski, to pursue the initiative in S. 1905, but to consider doing so within the context of improving housing for all of the residents of the eligible communities and assisting long-term residents to assume professional roles as teachers and administrators in their home communities and regions. Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments this morning.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Madsen appears in appendix.]

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Dr. Madsen.

Mr. Hill, good morning.

STATEMENT OF FRANK HILL, CO-DIRECTOR OF ALASKA RURAL SYSTEMIC INITIATIVES, A PROGRAM WITHIN THE ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES, AND FORMER SUPERINTENDENT OF THE LAKE AND PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT, ANCHORAGE, AK, ACCOMPANIED BY NELSON ANGAPAK, SR., EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES

Mr. HILL. Good morning, Senator Murkowski. For the record, my name is Frank Hill, I'm co-director, Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative; [AKRSI] a project sponsored by Alaska Federation of Natives [AFN] for the past 8 years or 9 years, and I've been co-director for the past 5 years. As you know, AFN is a Statewide Native organization formed in 1966 to represent Alaska's 100,000+ Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts on concerns and issues which affect the rights and property interests of the Alaska Natives on a statewide basis. I might include that there is 34,100 Alaska Natives students in that number. On behalf of AFN, it's Board of Directors and membership, thank you for inviting us to comment on S. 1905, the

Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2003. We applaud the efforts of the Honorable Lisa Murkowski in resolving the housing conditions for the teachers who teach in rural Alaska. My previous experience in Alaska education totals 29 years, including classroom math and science teacher, education program administrator, and 11 years as superintendent. With the exception of 3 years in Anchorage Schools, all of my educational experiences were in rural Alaska. I sort of went against the norm, I went from urban to rural and stayed there, where my home was. Thank you for introducing S. 1905. AFN supports this bill for a number of reasons, including but not limited to addressing the housing needs of teachers in rural Alaska. This bill, if Congress would pass it will solve one of the true human needs that exist in the education process as it addresses rural Alaska—the housing needs of the teachers and the educators in rural Alaska. In 1999, Julie Kitka, president of AFN, submitted a report to Congress entitled AFN Implementation Study. This is a 23-page document on proposals to the U.S. Congress to implement recommendations of the Alaska Natives Commission pursuant to Public Law 104–270. One of the proposals included that study addresses issues supporting Alaska Native education. For example, one of the findings was the critical need to create and implement programs designed to improve the quality of education for young Alaska Natives. The Commission found that innovative education programs were needed to help reverse the deterioration of socioeconomic conditions and the poor educational performance of many Alaska Native children, the majority of whom attend schools in small and remote traditional villages. The Commission also urged that parents and community leaders become compelling voices in directing Alaska's formal education system; that the education system employ teachers and administrators knowledgeable about Native cultures and respectful of them; and that Alaska Natives receive an integrated education—one that provides them not only with the skills to succeed in life, but also the understanding necessary to carry on their cultures' community values. We raise these points to demonstrate that it is critical to attract teachers and educators with qualifications to teach in rural Alaska; and it is critical to see that they have incentives to remain in rural Alaska. One of those incentives would be quality housing as intended by S. 1905 if it is enacted into law. The retention of qualified teachers and educators in rural Alaska has a definite potential to improve the quality of education received by the students attending the schools in rural Alaska districts. I believe that improved education by the students attending these rural school districts will improve if we end up with higher quality through this process. The passage of this bill would also have some other benefits as well, employment opportunities being one of them. Unemployment in rural Alaska ranges on the average, 60 to 80 percent in the most villages. The passage of S. 1905 will create employment opportunities, at least during the construction of the housing units in the villages where it is really needed. Local hire, senate bill 1905 should mandate local hire for qualified people, both Alaska Native and non-Native, living in the villages where the construction of the housing units will take place. In this instance, local would mean people living in the communities where the teacher housing con-

struction would occur. It would also improve in a small way, improvement of local economies. Local hire will have a short term improvement of local economies where it is really needed. While these improvements are short-term, they will be beneficial to those communities. In terms of ownership of housing and land, AFN strongly recommends that the local village entities, including the local village corporation and/or local tribal entity, be given the first right of refusal on the ownership of the housing units in the villages. The housing units in the villages would be leased to the school district under which the local school operates. This will ensure that the landlords of the housing units are local rather than some distant owner. In terms of program policies, on page 9 of the bill, beginning on line 19, S. 1905 states that the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, after consulting with eligible school districts, shall establish policies governing the administration of grant and loan funds made available under this act. AFN strongly recommends the inclusion and the participation of local entities where the eligible district is located. One of the critical elements of the success of the housing units envisioned pursuant to S. 1905 is the "local ownership" in terms of policy of these units. Authorization of appropriations: during a recent discussion with a knowledgeable school administrator, it was estimated that at least $100 million would be needed annually to address the teacher housing needs in rural Alaska.

AFN recommends that Congress considers actual appropriations of at least $100 millions annually to implement the intent of this bill through the life of this authorization. With public schooling being in Alaska for over 100 years, there are many, many challenges facing educators in trying to deliver a quality program for Alaska's rural schools and native students that primarily live there. Among them, of course, is the high level of teacher turnover, not just from year to year, but, as pointed out earlier today by Mr. Simon, that it's sometimes within the school year. This disruption of the instructional process has been shown to be associated with negative effects on student achievement—academic achievement and performance. This high level of teacher turnover is primarily a rural school problem. Alaska's largest urban districts have historic annual turnover rates between 6 and 14 percent comparable to—and that's comparable to the national average. All Alaska school districts with turnover rates over 30 percent or more are rural districts far from the main road system. A study entitled "Retaining Quality Teachers for Alaska", by William McDermitt, UAA/ISER, 2000, demonstrated that a primary reason for teacher turnover is the lack of adequate or quality housing for teachers. Schools are required to use precious instructional funding to recruit and hire teachers year after year. This is an issue only rural schools face.

In order to attract and retain quality teachers for rural schools, many rural school districts provide housing for their teachers. 11 rural school districts subsidize the cost of housing if district housing is not available as you have heard from the two educators earlier. The School Board Association does a survey every year and that's where that documentation comes from. Recently, a rural school Superintendent told me that 8 cents of every school district

dollar budgeted was to provide and maintain teacher housing. Yet again, this is an expense only Alaska's rural schools must deal with.

While a District Superintendent, I interviewed hundreds of prospective teachers in my 11 years as superintendent and previously as one of the key recruiters for teachers in rural schools. I interviewed lots and lots of teachers. One of the first questions they asked, as was pointed out, is what kind of housing will I have before they asked about salary, before they asked about how far is it to Anchorage, they always asked about housing and then does it actually have a flush toilet and a light switch that will turn the lights on?

At Lake and Pen I used to think that we were attractive as a rural district because we had such a great program, but I think it also was somewhat a result of our efforts to maintain and keep real good housing for our teachers, knowing that that was a critical element in their retention. The funding proposed by S. 1905 will be a welcome relief for rural schools. If successful, the funding could effectively increase the funds spent on instruction, and could lead to improvement in instruction, and better student achievement. We could be—with this funding we could begin to reduce the high teacher turnover rate in rural Alaska schools, thereby decreasing the costs of annually recruiting new teachers.

Again, these funds that we saved could be used in the instructional program. We congratulate you, Senator Murkowski and the entire Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for developing and sponsoring this bill. By removing the issue of teacher housing for rural Alaska's schools as an issue that negatively impacts student achievement, schools would be able to do a better job of providing a quality education. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Hill appears in appendix.]

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you. Thank you, both. Let's see—let's go to you, Dr. Madsen. I appreciate the attention you've given to not just the rural teacher housing. Obviously, the focus of this hearing and my legislation is on that one component as we look at how we deliver the best education possible to our kids in our rural areas and recognize without the teachers there to deliver the education, it's very difficult to do a good job. And if it's the housing issue that is the big bone of contention, as it certainly appears from what we've heard this morning, how can we deal with it. But I appreciate your concern that we are just looking at one component of the problem out in rural Alaska.

I have been very involved with housing legislation in the Senate and have signed on and helped move a couple housing initiatives just this past year that will help with low income loans to individuals, first time buyers. We had the dream home initiative was one of them. We were also involved with the latest one that just moved through which was the home program funds, disbursed to State and local governments to assist with expansion of housing for low income families, so there is a recognition that we need to do more, and I appreciate your highlighting that in your testimony, and I want you to know that I agree with you. We've got a long way to go on these issues.

As I have gone out to many of the communities, we're looking at the new clinics that are being built in so many of our rural villages through the AME assistance of the Denali Commission, but we recognize that in order to get the health professionals that we need, they also need adequate housing. And your point that we want to encourage those people who have lived in these communities that have been born and raised there, we want to encourage them to stay, and how can we assist them with their housing needs as well? It is a huge issue for us to tackle in rural Alaska. And I think those of us that have been out there, Mr. Hill you've been teaching out there for 29 years in various parts of rural Alaska, we recognize that this is not just something that is directed to teachers. So we have—we've got a long ways to go. I think you and I are in agreement on what it is that we have to do. I guess my legislation is one small step in one area. But, again, I do appreciate you bringing those to my attention.

You indicate support in your testimony, maybe not support, but you suggested that as we try to provide incentives for those that have been in the communities for long periods of time, that perhaps some form of scholarship assistance might be something to pursue. This is far afield of our legislation today, but it's something that I know when we're talking about student loan forgivenesses for our teachers and our nurses in order to encourage them to remain in our communities, that's certainly one area that we've looked, but do you think that this scholarship assistance might be one way that we can address the problems that you've pointed out?

Mr. MADSEN. Yes; very definitely. Context matters so that we as policymakers and school people need to pay attention to the context in which our efforts work. And this is actually a constructive step, and I hope I was clear about that.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Yeah.

Mr. MADSEN. And I think that you summarized well the surrounding issues, and I would certainly be supportive of any efforts to try to address the larger issues of housing for the communities in general, and for the long-term interests of trying to assist people in those communities to become professionals, both health care professionals, and education professionals. I think that's where the long-term future looks brightest.

Senator MURKOWSKI. I agree. I appreciate you bringing them up. I think your points are extremely well taken.

Mr. Hill, I want to talk to you a little bit about your experience 29 years in various schools in various communities. You say 11 years as a superintendent, 29 years in the classroom in various communities.

Mr. HILL. I'm sorry, maybe I didn't word that right. My 11 years was included in the 29.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay.

Mr. HILL. Okay.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, you still spent along time out in various rural communities. You heard the testimony of the two teachers that we had here, Mr. Simon is a superintendent, in your experience with teacher housing over the years in parts of rural Alaska that you resided in, is your story very similar to what we heard from the teachers and superintendent?

Mr. HILL. Sure. Being—I think the anxiety the teachers have and just the worry alone about what am I going home to after the classroom is certainly distracting to the quality of education. I don't know how you could be a human being without that. My experience was primarily on the Alaska peninsula and the Bristol Bay region. And I've visited lots and lots of teacher housing units.

There was some advantage in being very close to the water-borne transportation system where the costs probably were a little bit less to deliver construction materials, but there are still places where in conditions of low water you had to helicopter and fly fuel into communities to just keep the schools and the housing units warm. That's for everyone in that community. So those conditions do exist and I wouldn't say that any of them, they were probably being polite by not—maybe it sounded exaggerating at some point, but it's certainly not in my experience.

Senator MURKOWSKI. You have indicated, and I appreciate the way that you've laid it out in your testimony, you've indicated that our rural schools here in Alaska face different challenges, different costs than anything that we might experience here in the urban part of the state, or similar situations in the Lower 48, that our rural schools have expenses that nobody else has, that you've got to incorporate those into your budget. You've indicated, again, when we talk about it, a teacher and administrative turnover rate of 30 percent a year and administrator turnover rate of 44 percent a year, that you as a district then have to spend additional time and money in recruiting teachers that we might not experience here in Anchorage, which is something again that I don't think we stop to think about how much time, energy, and money you spend in that recruitment process.

Mr. HILL. That's true. As an example, last year I checked with the Anchorage School District and they had a waiting list of 600 teachers wanting a job here.

Senator MURKOWSKI. And what was your situation out in Lake Pen district?

Mr. HILL. We couldn't—I don't think we would have had anywhere near 800. We—we'd have been surprised if we had two or three looking to work with us, and they may have been transfers from neighboring districts, but we've never had a—I don't recall in all the years that I've worked in rural districts that someone's going to put me on your list for next year. So I think there are many advantages to urban districts over rural in this case.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, you've got the extra time and energy, money that needs to go into the recruitment, then you're looking at spending instructional dollars in order to provide some form of housing, whether it's housing subsidy or whether it is—you've got to do something to entice these teachers to come to your district. As Superintendent Simon mentioned, there a competition amongst the districts to attract the teachers, and it sounds, from his testimony anyway, that decent housing with a flush toilet is going to be one of those criteria that will cause the teacher to go with that district as opposed to this district. So again, as a rural area you have a cost that an urban area simply would not have to deal with.

Mr. HILL. Exactly.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Now, in the Lake Pen district, did the district provide housing or were the teachers and the staff on their own?

Mr. HILL. In one or two teacher sites primarily the teachers were required to live in district-provided housing. They—the local administrator—they were—it was not free of charge. They were paying a rent and a schedule was worked out with the local bargaining unit to do that. However, it was subsidized. We were lucky enough to become a borough—actually that was my first job as superintendent was to help REA become a borough, and in that process we transferred the ownership of the housing unit to the borough.

That helped us get away from this one requirement from the State where we had to spend 70 percent of the State funds on instruction. There's a 70/30 rule. You cannot spend more than 30 percent of your State dollars on other than instruction. Your bill would certainly give the opportunity to take that piece of that budget off that 70—the wrong side of 70/30 and help those districts which I think—I don't recall, but there's at least 1 dozen every year and they're all rural, primarily, who have to get a waiver from the Department of Education to address this issue.

Senator MURKOWSKI. And if—if in fact—let's assume that this legislation doesn't move forward just for conversation sake here, but if you've got a situation where you've got an essentially the State mandate that says, you know, you've got this cap here and it has to go for instructional costs, and the districts are limited in their ability to do anything with housing, not able to get the teachers or not able to keep the teachers more likely, we've got this kind of a downward spiral in terms of the quality of education that we can deliver out there.

I don't mean to be overly pessimistic, but if we can't—if we can't provide some kind of housing out there that has minimal standards, how do you keep your teachers? You tell me a little bit about how you did this recruitment process because you indicated that you were involved with that for some time. How much does that factor into the prospective teacher's decision?

Mr. HILL. A lot. In fact, we found it wise after a couple of years instead of just telling them about it, we actually made some video and showed pictures of the housing units that were available in the community so that people could see oh, there's a bed, there's a toilet that flushes, that kind of thing. So in order—and not to say that we would mislead teachers, but I could see that after a period of time if you'd been working in situations where housing was a big problem, you would want to see actual proof.

Mind you, most of the recruiting is taking place right here in Anchorage. And the first time they see any of the places they're going to live is when they first show up on the first day of the job. I don't believe any rural districts can afford to fly the people out to get a look at their housing units prior to making the decision to go there. So there's lots of issues related to that, that are that critical. I've had—we've made offers to teachers, you know, saying you're the person we want for this instructional team in Chignik Lagoon and they walk around that contract offer shopping housing next because they already have a contract. I don't blame them. I think that that's realistic.

I recall in one community mentoring a very bright young couple in a two-teacher school and there was a very, very small apartment, and I didn't realize that they—they never let us know—that they left their two children behind, and they—in the beginning of the school year in the housing that they were in that we provided was very, very small. They were looking for ways at Christmas to bring their family up and—because it just didn't make sense for them to be away from their two children for the period of time they were going to be in Alaska. I think they were from Washington state somewhere.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Do you recall how old their children were?

Mr. HILL. Pre-teen.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Pre-teen.

Mr. HILL. Yes; Because there was no high school in that community; they were wondering basically if they could teach their own kids. That was the first question they asked. So they thought it would be better for them to be in the school they were in. But anyway, they negotiated with me to move out of the small apartment that we had to one where a local person invited them to live because the community really valued those teachers and wanted them to stay, even after 6 months. This was a place where they had teachers sometimes leave. We had two changeovers in that same village in 1 year previously. So it was really a revelation to us to have a community member offer their house and it was a nice house for them to even stay. So housing was a big issue just from the issue of having a real family.

For something else that hasn't been said here, but typically district housing is not occupied during the summer, and there's probably good reason for some, if you do any maintenance, that's the time to do it. There's an opportunity to do that. But I recall how shocking it was to my school board once when we had three different families who had three or four children each who actually asked to stay in teacher housing year-round. We didn't even have a policy for that. All of our rental units for agreement were for 10 months and 9 months.

So to have something where they felt really comfortable, and this is our home and we don't want to leave, we'd have to go pay rent somewhere else, so they were already secured in their housing. They didn't want somebody else to get it so they stayed in it year-round, basically is what it boiled down to, they didn't want somebody to come in and find somebody else living in the house that they had, so they asked to stay year-round.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Is it fair to suggest then that because housing is such an issue and such an unknown in certain areas, to listen to Ms. Davis's testimony about having to essentially make arrangements with two strangers, two males unknown she was going to share a house with for the next year, is it fair to say that we're not seeing families come up to teach because of the shortage? You might be able to find one room, but to find a place for you and your family.

I know when I met the principal at Savoonga, the one that was living in the broom closet, his wife refused to move to Savoonga because there was no place for her, and she wasn't about to stay at the school. Is this what we're seeing? We're able to attract the

young people fresh out of school who are willing to come to Alaska for a bit of an adventure and can deal with less than optimal housing, but we're not able to attract the older, more established teacher who might have a family?

Mr. HILL. That's certainly true. There are exceptions, of course. People who find a situation where adequate housing is—to bring their families, sometimes they won't learn that until they've been there 1 or 2 years and can figure out the community and which community they'd like to be in and which—you know, where their family would be comfortable. So I would say that it's probably after—at least after the first year before they make that determination, but typically districts can't, as hard as it is to develop housing just for the classroom teachers, to provide housing for families included would be even more expensive. So that's—maybe it's really a function of cost.

Senator MURKOWSKI. This goes back to Dr. Madsen's concern that what we want to do, we don't want teachers to just kind of swing by, teach for a couple of years and then move on out, we don't want to be the training ground for these teachers, we want them to bring their families here. We want them to raise their families here and be part of this community. And if you don't have the facilities for them to feel that they are part of that community or those that have been around for a long time, we want to figure out the way to keep them here along with their families.

Mr. HILL. Along with that, I'd like to support his concept of growing our own. I think that's very important. I know there's at least three initiatives ongoing now to do that, but there's only less than 5 percent per teaching staff, Alaska Native or rural or residents who live in rural Alaska are teachers. That number has not changed in 30 years. If you are going to get up to the percentage of Alaska Native students in the State which is just under 24 percent, we have a long ways to go, there's probably 1,500 to 1,800 teachers that have to be grown, and that would certainly to go a long ways toward solving the turnover, provided they all meet the qualifications that we're looking for.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Is there any data—recent data—that we collect on the status of teacher housing across the State? I'm sure within the respective districts there is, but do we have a compilation at the State level?

Mr. HILL. I thought such existed. But just last week I checked with the Department of Education and the School Board Association and their annual housing—the teachers salary and benefits surgery, and the only thing that they have is what districts subsidize housing. That was again, I pointed out 11 districts subside housing somewhere. I in fact spoke with someone at the Denali Commission who was dealing with the funding proposal that you had just indicated earlier about working with teacher housing issues and she assumed the same thing and found that the first their they have to do is fund a study to find out the condition of teacher housing around the state. So that's probably a good first step is to find where the needs are greatest. I really think it ought to be also a priority for housing and development authority, first go to those districts who have the greatest need, not just in terms

of lack of housing, but also looking at the academic performance of kids to tie those two things together.

Senator MURKOWSKI. But so far as you're aware, we don't have that data yet?

Mr. HILL. No.

Senator MURKOWSKI. So we're not in a position to do any prioritization?

Mr. HILL. Not that I'm aware of.

Senator MURKOWSKI. I think we are just now starting to really shine the spotlight on this issue and as we look to how our children are doing from district to district and recognizing we've got a lot of work to do out in the rural areas, we look at it and say what is the issue here, what is the problem? When you come down to the statistics that reveal in district after district these incredibly high teacher turnover rates, you've got to look further and see what contributing factors are there.

Mr. HILL. Excuse me, I recall one other issue that many teachers told me they were leaving because they wanted to move to a place where they could actually invest in and start building a home of their own. In most cases in rural Alaska there's not a chance to spend that very high rent money on developing the ownership of your own home. So, typically young people, beginning professionals, are starting to look at that as a way to develop a life and to have the opportunity to start investing in their own home rather than paying rent. Which is the case, I'm sure, of a lot of long-term Anchorage teachers owning their own home and living in their own homes. There's—that's not the case in many rural districts at all. I'd be surprised if many owned their own homes at all unless they bought a piece of land way out somewhere.

Senator MURKOWSKI. And then you throw in the concerns that we heard earlier just in terms of the cost of building, the very high cost of transportation, equipment, it's almost prohibitive in certain areas. And if you don't know that you're going to be there beyond a year, it's pretty tough to make that commitment.

Mr. HILL. Exactly.

Senator MURKOWSKI. What other, in terms of ways that rural schools or districts have to provide for adequate teacher housing—we have—we've talked about the districts basically making that budgetary decision that they may have to use instructional dollars to do this, but what other means at the state level are available for districts or for——

Mr. HILL. Not many except in the case where you might have a construction project, as was indicated earlier, and there's an opportunity to spend some of your construction moneys, not necessarily directly on teacher housing but to take that opportunity of transporting materials along with the school construction materials to do that. There's some limited opportunity that way. That's only in cases of very high priority capital projects that State funds on an annual basis. It's highly competitive. I sat on that State committee that set their priorities for, I think it was 6 years, and in those 6 years I don't recall any urban district ever having the highest priority in terms of life, health, and safety, but teacher housing is not on that list.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Right.

Mr. HILL. You cannot spend money on teacher housing without—with State dollars. So, it's a very limited opportunity except in some cases I'm sure there's some local entrepreneurial people who have their own land who could develop and see an opportunity to rent to teachers on an annual basis, but that's very——

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, gentlemen, I appreciate your testimony this morning. As I've indicated. Mr. Rose's testimony is on the back table as well as the additional submitted testimony that we have received from the Commissioner of the Department of Education and the former principal of the Savoonga School. I would again invite any of you who are interested to submit additional testimony. The record will remain open for 2 weeks.

The committee aide for the Committee on Indian Affairs will make sure that you get the information on where to send the testimony, but you can always send it to my office in Washington DC and we will make sure that it gets filed with the committee. But I want to thank those that provided the testimony this morning, those that came to listen from the various perspectives. I see some folks with AHFC, with HUD, people that are just very interested in seeing how we can make a difference.

I think there's a few very key points that we have learned from all of our witnesses this morning, and that is that teacher housing is a critical component in recruiting and retaining quality teachers in Alaska. And if we don't have the teachers in our rural communities, we cannot expect good performance for our students. This is something that is imperative that we deal with if we want to make sure that our kids in the rural parts of the state get the best possible education, and we certainly owe it to them to give them that. We want to work toward that end.

When we look at those expenses, those costs that these rural schools and school districts assume, that no other schools or school districts really have to take on in terms of using your instructional money for teacher housing in order to keep your teachers there, that's a balancing act, that's a choice that we really don't want to put our schools and our districts in. We want to know that the money is getting into the classrooms so that we're really helping those kids.

So we've got a big project ahead of us. We will be hopefully moving this legislation through the process on the Senate side and working on various other initiatives to see what we can do to make housing more available in all parts of rural Alaska. We're starting with the teachers, but that doesn't mean that we don't also focus on the other areas of need throughout the state when it comes to housing. So, I appreciate the time from all of you this morning. Thank you, and good day. With that we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12 noon, the committee was adjourned, to reconvene at the call of the Chair.]

APPENDIX

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAVE BAUER, PRINCIPAL OF THE SAVOONGA SCHOOL, BERING STRAIT SCHOOL DISTRICT

While principal at Savoonga, I lived at the school in a closet, with a chair and table, to be able to provide enough beds and rooms for my teaching staff. The next year, I had to have two male teachers share a house where one of them had to walk through the other's bedroom to use the bathroom.

This year I have better housing, however, I still had to replace a heating unit and a stove to make it adequate. I will be losing at least two teachers at the end of the year because of inadequate housing.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOE CLADOUHOS PRESIDENT/CEO NORTON SOUND HEALTH CORPORATION

S. 1905 "To provide habitable living quarters for teachers, administrators, Other school staff, and their households in rural areas of Alaska located in or near Alaska Native Villages."

On behalf of the Norton Sound Health Corporation Board of Directors and staff, I support the intent of S. 1905 and would appreciate the sponsor's consideration to amend the bill to include staff housing for physician assistants based in Alaska Native communities and housing for itinerants that frequently travel to provide specialized health care to patients in rural Alaskan communities.

A non-profit consortium of 20 tribes, NSHC was one of the first Native health organizations in the country to assume complete responsibility for all health services in the region. NSHC was founded in 1970. The board of directors is comprised of consumers chosen by the 20 tribal governments in the region.

NSHC operates Norton Sound Regional Hospital in Nome, the hub city of the region with a population of 3,448 residents. NSHC also operates health clinics in 15 Native Alaskan villages scattered on the coast and island of the Bering Sea, all covering the size of State of Ohio. Of the 15 villages, all have mid-level practitioners [Physician Assistants or Nurse Practitioners] assigned for at least part-time coverage. Seven villages are designated as the primary residence of Mid-level Practitioners [MLPs]. Lack of available housing is evident in all 15 villages.

Itinerant clinicians also provide specialized health care services such as eye care, dental, WIC, audiology, Maternal and Children's Health Care, and many other medically related services. These health care workers usually stay in the health clinic while in the villages. This arrangement causes some crowding in the facility, creates confusion during emergencies, diminishes the comfort and privacy of travelers and overloads busy clinics.

A solution to this problem like the teaching housing situation would be to build new staff and itinerant structured with a separate area for itinerants, ideally a two-bedroom with an attached small apartment.

Due to lack of adequate housing for mid-levels and itinerant health care providers, patients in the surrounding villages do not receive the quality care they need and deserve. Mid-levels want to live in a village to provide care but they do not have the opportunity due to lack of housing. Itinerants would visit more villages and stay longer in each village, but are forced to cut their visits short due lack of housing.

NSHC is committed to ensure each patient in our region receive the best health care they deserve no matter where they live, but we are seriously constrained by the housing crisis and cannot place mid-levels in villages without a suitable place to live. Please consider amending S. 1905 to include the provision of habitable living quarters for mid-levels and itinerant health care professionals in Alaska Native communities.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROBERT J. CLARK, PRESIDENT/CEO, BRISTOL BAY AREA HEALTH CORPORATION, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, ALASKA NATIVE HEALTH BOARD, ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL HEALTH CONSORTIUM

On behalf of the 34 tribes that form the Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation, we support your bill "to provide hospitable living quarters, administrators, other school staff, and their households in rural areas of Alaska located in or near Alaska Native Villages".

We ask for an amendment to "include staff housing for Mid-Level Practioners [Physician Assistants and Nurse Practioners] based in Alaska Native Communities and housing for itinerants that frequently travel to provide specialized health care to patients in rural Alaskan communities".

The testimony of Mr. Joe Cladouhos, President/CEO of the Norton Sound Health Corporation on S. 1905 while speaking for his 20 tribes in North West Alaska and their needs, could just as easily be the testimony of all our 12 regions that have similar needs.

Our Alaska health care system relies on Sub Regional Clinics, whatever they be HRSA, 330 Clinics, Frontier Clinics, or other similarly funded clinics, however with the national Mid Level shortage of positions, we are hampered by adequate reasonable cost housing for these positions in our villages leaving care to less then adequate itinerant coverage.

Thank you for considering this need and sharing this with our Congressional Delegation.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PEGGY A. COLE, TEACHER, LOWER YUKON SCHOOL DISTRICT

Good morning, my name is Peggy Cole and I am a teacher in the Lower Yukon School District [LYSD], located in western Alaska. LYSD consists of 11 sites spread along the Yukon River and the Bering seacoast covering approximately 22,000 square miles. There are about 2,000 students, 99 percent of which are Yupik Eskimo. I have taught in LYSD for 12 years and have lived in teacher housing during that time. My family and I have lived in 3 villages in our school district. At each site, we have lived in BIA housing units, which are 50 or more years old. These houses had many problems and were in need of costly repairs.

There are virtually no houses available to rent in the villages, and what is available, would be considered substandard by most teachers. Therefore, the school district rents the houses to the teachers, who are required to live in District housing as part of their contract. The school district picks up the cost of water, sewer, electricity, and maintenance. According to the District, the high cost of these utilities leaves little revenue for maintenance on the housing.

The cost of living in rural Alaska is very high compared to Anchorage. Here is a simple example, milk costs about $3.50 in Anchorage, it costs $8.98 in Emmonak and it is not even available in many villages. Supplies of all types must be flown into the village during the year, or barged in during the summer months. There are no roads connecting western Alaska to a hub where supplies can be purchased and delivered in a cheaper manner.

While working in this school district, I have had the opportunity to visit many of the 104 teacher housing units throughout the district. Most of them were in fair to poor condition. only 8 new, teacher housing units have been constructed in the past 12 years in our district. During the summer of 1996, as a cost saving measure, the District purchased 3 mobile homes and barged them to Hooper Bay to act as teacher housing. That did not work at all. They were cold and drafty; the walls cracked and there were problems with the water/sewer lines.

The school district wants to keep the rent at a reasonable price in order to attract and retain quality teachers to provide stability in the classrooms, but building new houses in rural Alaska is extremely costly. As a "Band-Aid" to the problem, LYSD spent over $1 million from their CIP fund to upgrade the existing housing throughout the District last summer. These upgrades have helped to make the houses look more pleasing to the eye, but have not solved the problems with structural, electrical, water/sewer issues or age of the units.

At some sites, single teachers are required to live together because of the scarcity of adequate housing units. This does not promote stability of teaching staffs at some schools, because many teachers do not want to live with a total stranger.

With the added stress to the budget of the new NCLB law, the increase to PERS/TRS and the increasing cost of insurance, there is no money available in our district to do any more upgrades on teacher housing.

S. 1905, Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2003, which Senator Murkowski is sponsoring, would make moneys available to these rural districts, like LYSD. This money would allow our district to build new teacher housing units, which would help to entice teachers to come to rural Alaska to work. The passage of this bill would also allow the district to get the needed money to bring all of our housing units up to the rigid standards of today's world. I strongly encourage you to support Senator Murkowski in her efforts to get S. 1905 passed.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JENNIFER DAVIS, TECHNOLOGY TRAINER, NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

I have lived in Kotzebue, AK for the past 5 years and work as an itinerant technology trainer in the 11 villages of Northwest Arctic. There is no school district provided housing in Kotzebue. We must locate our own housing in the community and then pay extremely high costs for what many consider to be substandard conditions. I live in a 250 square foot apartment that costs $1,050 a month. I feel lucky that I was able to find an apartment that is clean and in good repair. There is a shortage of housing in Kotzebue that makes it difficult to find adequate housing. Many people who move here take anything they can find available, sight unseen. They often arrive to find the apartment or house they have rented filthy and in need of work to make repairs but they cannot move elsewhere because there isn't anything else. When I moved to Kotzebue, I rented my first apartment over the phone and arrived to find the furnished apartment very dirty, lacking furniture, and sinking into the permafrost on one side. I cleaned the apartment as best I could, sealed a broken window with plywood and made my new home as comfortable as possible but I did not feel like Kotzebue would be my home for long. Luckily, I found another apartment just before the end of my first school year that even though small is comfortable and clean. My only complaint now is the excessive cost of housing in Kotzebue. I would like to move into a larger place but cannot afford to do so. My current rent is about a third of my salary each month.

My job takes me to each of the villages surrounding Kotzebue where I stay with other teachers while I am there. There is some district owned teacher housing in each of the 10 villages. The quality of this housing varies greatly from village to village. Buckland, Kivalina, Noatak, Noorvik, and Shungnak have school district housing for all teachers but many are living with roommates when they would prefer not to if more housing were available. In Ambler, Deening, Kiana, Kobuk, and Selawik there is school district housing for the school administrator and some of the teachers. The district leases housing from the community if there is not enough district housing. In the villages that will allow it, some of the teachers have purchased or built their own homes. Some of the housing does not have plumbing and many of the units are badly in need of renovations and repairs. Some teachers have reported unsafe conditions in or around their apartments. We had a teacher injured from a fall due to a leak in her ceiling that has been there for over a year and not been repaired. Some of our teachers haul their own water and oil for their houses and a few are still dealing with honey-buckets.

The Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2003 would help the district in attracting and retaining quality educators. We currently have about a 30-percent turnover each year and housing conditions and cost are a large part of the reason people leave. Each year, as I think about signing my contract and create a list of positives and negatives, housing is the only thing in the negative column for me. This act would make it possible for the district to build and provide housing for Kotzebue educators, which would allow more people to feel able to make it their home. Our villages need more housing to be built and for serious renovations to be made. Many educators move to Northwest Arctic with the intent of making it their home but if

they do not have adequate, comfortable, affordable housing they will not stay. The high teacher turnover that we currently have is hard on the children in the region and I think anything we can do to improve teacher retention will benefit our kids.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF FRANK HILL, CO-DIRECTOR, ALASKA RURAL SYSTEMIC INITIATIVE ALASKA FEDERATIONS OF NATIVES

Good morning, Chairman Murkowski, and other honorable members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, ladies and gentlemen:

For the record, my name is Frank Hill, Co-Director, Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative; [AKRSI] a project sponsored by Alaska Federation of Natives [AFN]. As the Honorable Lisa Murkowski knows, AFN is a statewide Native organization formed in 1966 to represent Alaska's 100,000+ Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts on concerns and issues which affect the rights and property interests of the Alaska Natives on a statewide basis.

On behalf of AFN, it's Board of Directors and membership, thank you very much for inviting me to submit my comments regarding S. 1905, the Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2003. We applaud the efforts of the Honorable Lisa Murkowski in resolving the housing conditions for the teachers who teach in rural Alaska.

I ask that this written statement and my oral comments be incorporated into the record of this public hearing. I further request that the record of this hearing remain open for at least 2 weeks so that representatives of the Alaska Native Community may submit their comments regarding these bills as well.

My previous experience in Alaska education totals 29 years, including classroom math and science teacher, education program administrator, and 11 years as Superintendent. With the exception of 3 years in Anchorage Schools, all of my educational experiences were in rural Alaska schools.

Comments on S. 1905

Thank you for introduction of S. 1905; AFN supports this bill for a number of reasons, including but not limited to addressing the housing needs of teachers in rural Alaska. This bill, if Congress would pass it will solve one of the true human needs that exist in the education process as it addresses rural Alaska—the housing needs of the teachers and the educators in rural Alaska.

In 1999, Julie Kitka, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, submitted a report to Congress entitled AFN IMPLEMENTATION STUDY. This is a 23-page document on Proposals to the U.S. Congress to implement recommendations of the Alaska Natives Commission pursuant to Public Law 104–270. One of the proposals included in the AFN IMPLEMENTATION STUDY addresses issues on SUPPORTING ALASKA NATIVE EDUCATION. For example, one of the key findings of the Alaska Natives Commission's Final Report to Congress was the critical need to create and implement programs designed to improve the quality of education for young Alaska Natives.

The Commission found that innovative education programs were needed to help reverse the deterioration of socio-economic conditions and the poor educational performance of many Alaska Native children, the majority of whom attend schools in small and remote traditional Native villages.

The Commission also urged that parents and community leaders become compelling voices in directing Alaska's formal education system; that the education system employ teachers and administrators knowledgeable about Native cultures and respectful of them; and that Alaska Natives receive an integrated education-one that provides them not only with the skills to succeed in life, but also the understanding necessary to carry on their cultures' community values.

I raised these two points, in part, to demonstrate that it is critical to attract teachers and educators with qualifications to rural Alaska; and it is critical to see that they have incentives to remain in rural Alaska. One of those incentives would be quality housing as intended by S. 1905 if it is enacted into law.

The retention of qualified teachers and educators in rural Alaska has a definite potential of improving the quality of education received by the students attending the schools in rural Alaska school districts, I believe. Improved education by the students attending rural school districts will improve the chances of such students to obtain higher education-either college or technical with greater success.

The passage of S. 1905 will have the following ancillary benefits as well:

1. **Employment Opportunities:** Unemployment in rural Alaska ranges on the average, 60 to 80 percent in the villages. The passage of S. 1905 will create employment opportunities, at least during the construction of the housing units is concerned where it is really needed.

2. **Local Hire:** S. 1905 should mandate local hire of qualified people, both Alaska Native and non-Native, living in the villages where the construction of the

housing units will take place. In this instance, local would mean people living in the communities where the teacher housing construction would occur.

3. **Improvement of Local Economies:** Local hire will have a short term improvement of local economies where it is really needed; and while these improvements may be short term, they will be beneficial to those communities.

4. **Ownership of Housing and Land:** AFN strongly recommends that the local village entities, including the local village corporation and/or local tribal entity, be given the first right of refusal on the ownership of the housing units in the villages. The housing units in the villages would be leased by the school district under which the local school operates. This will ensure that the landlords of the housing units are local rather than some distant owner.

5. **Program Policies:** On page 9, beginning on line 19, S. 1905 states that the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, after consulting with eligible school districts, shall establish policies governing the administration of grant and loan funds made available under this Act. AFN strongly recommends the inclusion and the participation of local entities where the eligible district is located. One of the critical elements of the success of the housing units envisioned pursuant to S. 1905 is the "local ownership" in terms of policy of these units.

6. **Authorization of Appropriations:** During a recent discussion with a knowledgeable school administrator, it was estimated that at least $100 million would be needed annually to address the teacher housing needs in rural Alaska. AFN recommends that Congress considers actual appropriations of at least $100 millions annually to implement the intent of this bill through the life of this authorization.

Since public schooling began in rural Alaska, even in the best of scenarios, it has been challenging to deliver consistently high quality instruction to Alaska Natives and other students in Alaska's rural schools.

Among the many challenges facing Alaska's rural schools, is the high level of teacher turnover, not just from year to year, but, sometimes within the school year. This disruption of the instructional process has been shown to be associated with negative affects on student academic performance. [Grissmer et al, 2000]

This high level of teacher turnover in Alaska is, primarily, a rural school problem. Alaska's largest urban districts have historic annual turnover rates between 6 and 14 percent comparable to the national average. [1996–2000] All Alaska districts with turnover rates of 30 percent or more are rural districts far from the main road system. A study entitled "Retaining Quality Teachers for Alaska", Wm. McDiarmid, UAA/ISER, 2000, demonstrated that a primary reason for teacher turnover is the lack of adequate or quality housing for teachers.

Schools are required to use precious instructional funding to recruit and hire new teachers year after year. Again, an issue only rural schools in Alaska must deal with in this manner.

In order to attract and retain quality teachers for rural schools, many rural school districts provide housing for their teachers; 11 rural school districts subsidize the cost of housing if district teacher housing is not available. [Alaska Public School Teacher Salary and Benefits Report, 2002–03, Alaska Association of School Boards]. Recently, a rural school Superintendent told me that 8 cents of every school district dollar budgeted was to provide and maintain teacher housing. Yet again, another expense only Alaska's rural schools must deal with.

While a District Superintendent, I interviewed hundreds of prospective teachers for the District's rural schools. One of the first questions teachers asked was about the availability and quality of teacher housing in the community they would be teaching.

The funding proposed by S. 1905 will be a welcome relief for rural schools. If successful, the funding could effectively increase the funds spent on instruction, and could lead to improvement in instruction, and better student achievement.

Providing funding for rural school teacher housing would begin to reduce the high teacher turnover rate in rural Alaska schools, thereby decreasing the costs of annually recruiting new teachers. The funds saved could be used in the instructional program instead.

I congratulate Senator Murkowski and the entire Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for developing and sponsoring S. 1905. By removing the issue of teacher housing for rural Alaska's schools as an issue that negatively impacts student achievement, schools should be able to do a better job of providing a quality education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. I would be happy to answer questions regarding my testimony.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MELISSA HILL, ALASKA TEACHER PLACEMENT PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Senator Murkowski, please accept this testimony which has been endorsed by the following listed Teacher Placement Advisory Committee Members, in support of S. 1905 to provide habitable living quarters for teachers, administrators, other school staff, and their families in rural areas of Alaska.

For the record, my name is Melissa Hill and I serve as the Alaska Teacher Placement Program Director. Our program mission is to provide leadership in identifying, attracting, and placing highly qualified educators for our State. We work collaboratively with Alaska School Districts, university leaders, and other educational entities to promote the teaching profession in Alaska. We are located at the University of Alaska Statewide, Academic Affairs Office of the President.

We host the largest educator job fair in Alaska, post vacancies for Alaska School Districts, collect and maintain applications from teachers and administrators, and consult with educators interested in working in Alaska Schools. I travel throughout Alaska and the Lower 48 meeting with educators and answering questions about teaching, living and working in Alaska.

During the hiring season [February–July] in any given month our website receives over 116,000 hits and we will respond to over 300 e-mail inquiries, answer over 500 phone calls, and meet or consult with over 200 educators during our presentations and recruiting sessions. When speaking with educators interested in teaching in Alaska, we advise them to inquire about teacher housing and ask questions such as:

- Is the housing district owned?
- Does the housing have running water or a honey bucket?
- How much is the rent?
- What type of heating systems is installed?
- What is the condition of the housing?
- Is it shared housing with someone else?

We can attest to the fact that housing is a serious concern for educators, and it weights heavily on their decision to accept or reject employment in many of our rural school districts.

In addition, *limited housing* also impacts the hiring and recruiting process. For example, it is not uncommon for ATP to post a vacancy that reads, "teaching couple preferred" or "single male for shared housing". This type of recruiting forces districts to screen out otherwise qualified candidates based on the limitations of housing in that a particular village.

1Another factor impacting our new teachers is stagnant Alaska salaries. Teaching salaries in Alaska have not kept up with teaching salaries in the Lower 48. The lack of affordable housing, the increased cost of living, including food and transportation have many new teachers wondering if they can afford to relocate to rural Alaska. I spoke with a recent graduate from UAA who just completed her rural practicum. She indicated to me that she was interested in working in rural Alaska, but was not sure if she could afford it on a new teacher's salary. Perhaps, if affordable housing was available, this individual would be less apprehensive about accepting employment in rural Alaska. This is just one example.

It is our professional opinion that the Teacher Housing S. 1905 will greatly increase the Recruitment and Retention efforts going on around the State; help Districts redirect dollars that should be spent in the classroom, and offer our teachers and their families more options when considering employment in rural Alaska.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to submit this testimony.

ATP Advisory Committee Members and other Supporters:

1. Jim Hickerson, Assistant Superintendent Bering Strait School District.
2. Gary Baldwin, Assistant Superintendent Lower Kuskokwim. School District.
3. Carol Doyle, Superintendent Alaska Gateway School District.
4. Jeff Loftus, University of Alaska Southeast Professor.
5. Donna Gail Shaw, Associate Dean for Student and Curriculum Affairs, UAA College of Education.
6. Lorrie Scoles, Director Alaska New Teacher Mentoring and Induction Program.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ERIC MADSEN, DIRECTOR, RURAL PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS, AK

Senator Murkowski and members of the S. 1905 Hearing Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on S. 1905, the Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2003.

My comments are predicated on the assumption that while the immediate issue before us is habitable living quarters for teachers, administrators, and other school staff, the larger goal is increasing the academic achievement of the students in the eligible communities. Certainly any measures that enhance rural Alaska school districts' ability to recruit and retain skilled teachers would be helpful toward that larger goal. However, I believe that improving teacher housing would be most helpful in the context of a broader initiative.

When Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867, schooling for Alaska Native students fell under the prevailing assimilationist paradigni exemplified in the 1819 Civilization Fund Act, established specifically to "civilize" Native American students in the Lower 48. This paradigm was extended to Alaska through practices such as delegating responsibility for schools for Native students to missionary societies, and through policies such as the Nelson Act of 1905, which distinguished between students of mixed blood leading "civilized" lives and white students, on one hand, and students of mixed blood not leading "civilized" lives and Native students, on the other.

In 30 years working with rural communities, I have rarely heard anyone suggest that teachers from outside those communities are not necessary and helpful components of strong, well-rounded academic programs. But if our goal is only to make teachers from outside rural communities somewhat more physically comfortable so that we can extend their tenure by a couple of years, we run the risk of being perceived as doing little more than perpetuating the assimilationist paradigm to another generation of rural students, which I am sure is not the intent of this bill. In contrast, linking such an initiative to the larger issues would support rural communities' efforts to develop the kinds of schools that reflect their values and aspirations. There are several ways to approach this task.

First, while providing funds and a funding mechanism to improve housing for rural teachers would be a constructive step, it should be implemented within a context of improving housing and public facilities in rural communities, in general, to the extent those communities so desire. Absent this broader context, long-term residents of rural communities might reasonably ask why teacher housing should be any better, or any more of a priority, than housing for those who live there full-time.

Second, in order to improve the overall quality of students' school experiences and their academic achievement, I would suggest directing a portion of the available funds toward improving teacher housing, to respond to immediate needs, and a larger portion toward assisting long-term residents to become fully certificated, highly qualified, teachers in their home communities, to address the larger goal. Long-term residents have deep understanding of their communities, their schools, and their students, and many of them have years of experience in teaching and teaching assistance roles. Not incidentally, residents of rural communities also have their own housing. As my colleague Dean Norris-Tull observed in a conversation about Hearing, March 16, Anchorage Alaska Eric Madsen, Director, Rural Program Development S. 1905, Rural Teacher Housing Act School of Education, University of Alaska Fairbanks this topic, supporting rural residents' aspirations to become educators in their home communities simultaneously addresses, in a very real way, both the housing issues and the larger successful school experiences issues.

Such assistance might take several forms. The most direct approach would be to make academic scholarships available directly to long-term residents, contingent only upon satisfactory progress through a teacher preparation program. A second, and perhaps companion, form of support would be to fund release-time from work so that students who already serve in teaching assistance roles could remain close to their classrooms while completing their preparation programs. Third, I would urge you to pursue the improvement of teacher housing, but to consider doing so within the context of improving rural housing, in general.

The funding mechanisms to support teachers in training and rural housing improvement are already contemplated in S. 1905: tribally designated entities and village corporations for the scholarships and housing initiatives, and school districts for release time funding.

S. 1905's intent to provide habitable living quarters for rural teachers is a constructive step. Teachers play critical roles in the lives of students, and teachers who stay in rural communities long enough to become participants in community life and to better understand and appreciate their students are much more likely to fulfill

their roles effectively. They deserve, and doubtless would appreciate, safe, comfortable, functional housing.

That said, long-term residents of rural communities also deserve and would appreciate safe, comfortable, functional housing. Perhaps more to the point, rural students deserve teachers who have deep understanding of, and long-term commitment to, their communities. Certainly this includes the large number of teachers who grew up and trained elsewhere, but have found rural communities to be personally satisfying and professionally rewarding places to live, work, and raise their families. There are many of them, and their personal contributions to rural villages and their professional contributions to rural schools are significant and must be appreciated.

Nevertheless, the roughly 100-year history of public schooling in Alaska suggests that it is most frequently the residents of rural communities who provide both the continuity in those schools, and also the orientation and the nurturing that helps new teachers from outside become long-term, contributing participants in those settings.

I encourage you, Senator Murkowski, to pursue the initiative in S. 1905, but to consider doing so within the context of improving housing for all of the residents of the eligible communities and assisting long-term residents to assume professional roles as teachers and administrators in their home communities and regions.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on S. 1905.

Question: Would loans with a forgiveness feature be a viable alternative to, or option in addition to, scholarships?

Answer: In my opinion, no. There have been several programs over the years, and at least one currently operating, that included payback or forgiveness clauses. Experience indicates that students are extremely reluctant to participate. I believe that their reluctance is rooted in the very problem this hearing is designed to address: under-preparation for post-secondary academic work. There are many university students who graduated from rural schools who do well in university level academic programs, including those typically considered highly demanding. But rural high school graduates are also well aware that too many of their peers—some of whom graduated at the tops of their classes, often with honors—found themselves found themselves woefully underprepared for university level work. Given this ambiguity, our experience has been that many rural students are reluctant to assume large school-related debts until they have had a chance to test their skills in the post-secondary academic environment.

Please allow me to add that I do not intend this response as a criticism of the current cadre of students, educators, administrators, parents, or board members in our rural schools. It is a sad consequence of the legacy that all of us, as participants in the rural public schooling, have built up over the years. That is why I encourage us now to pay due attention to immediate needs, such as improved housing, but also to more sustainable solutions, such as developing a teaching force with both academic expertise and deep understanding and long-term commitment to the communities under discussion.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CARL ROSE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATION OF ALASKA SCHOOL BOARDS

For the record, my name is Carl Rose, Executive Director of the Association of Alaska School Boards. On behalf of Alaska's elected school board members, I would like to thank Sen. Murkowski and the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for tackling the issue of rural teacher housing.

AASB supports S. 1905, proposing a grant program to build housing for school district employees in rural Alaska. Inferior or unavailable teacher housing has been a long-time concern for school districts in rural Alaska. AASB Resolution 4.4, passed by our membership in November 2003, specifically cites inadequate rural teacher housing as a contributing factor in the teacher and administrator shortage.

The lack of suitable teacher housing in rural Alaska is really about reducing the teacher turnover rate. It is about attracting, and more importantly retaining, quality educators in areas of the state that need them most.

It is no surprise that rural Alaska, for the most part, lags behind the rest of the State, for a variety of reasons, when it comes to measurements of student achievement. Today, we are more serious than ever about changing that. Closing the achievement gap between the indigenous peoples of Alaska and others will require commitment-it will require quality instructors, involved parents, engaged students, caring communities, adequate funding, and yes, reasonable accommodations for school staff.

We must remember, housing is a basic need. By not attending to this, teachers are forced to spend their valuable discretionary time tending to this basic need rather than on classroom planning and other educational activities. The impact on the continuity of instructional programming is profound.

Exit interviews of departing teachers often cite their housing situation as a contributing factor in the decision to leave. Administrators lament their inability to secure funds for teacher housing when there are so many unmet needs in the way of student programs, major maintenance repairs and school construction needs.

The reality is—housing, in many parts of rural Alaska, is substandard when compared to the rest of the country. Some teachers have complained upon seeing their housing that they were tricked into coming to the district. The fact is, what appears to be substandard housing to new hires may, in fact, be the norm for that community.

Instead, we talk about Alaska's high starting salaries and the Great Alaskan Adventure in order to attract potential educators. Yet, for some teachers, the quality of teacher housing when they get to the district is anything but great. Poor insulation, leaking ceilings, and honey buckets, in the end, do little to retain quality educators.

Consider these anecdotes. In Kodiak, 1 year the district placed a teacher with construction skills on the payroll for 2 weeks prior to the school year so he could upgrade a teacher housing facility that contained a simple barrel wood stove into a livable unit. In Arctic Village, two teachers new to the village arrived, assuming that the teacher housing available last year would be available this year. It was not. One teacher ultimately found housing from a contractor who was leaving for the school year. The other teacher stayed in the school for a number of weeks while another unit was made available. She then moved into a vacant property [a known party home with a barrel stove] while renovations continued.

Last year Education Secretary Rod Paige and Sen. Murkowski were able to see first-hand the conditions facing rural Alaska. They, too, heard stories from teachers living out of classrooms, even closets.

If we really believe that all children can learn, and if we truly believe that No Child should be Left Behind, then we must create the environment in which that can happen. Adequate teacher housing that helps retain quality teachers is part of that equation.

For its part, the State of Alaska has been unable to meet the growing backlog of major maintenance and school construction projects for public schools for nearly 20 years. A tremendous backlog exists today-somewhere in the neighborhood of $530 million-and that does NOT include teacher housing. Our highest priority is to put money into the classroom. But skyrocketing operational costs and other mandates take money out of the classroom. Way down on the list of priorities is teacher housing.

For well over a decade we in Alaska have been managing decline. The loss of buying power due to inflation, coupled with increased fixed costs in the operational budget, have had a tremendous impact on the educational dollar.

As a young and rapidly growing State, Alaska is simply unprepared to address rural teacher housing at this time. Our infrastructure needs outpace available resources.

In conclusion. . . For many districts, staff housing is simply low on the priority list when it comes to spending scarce educational resources. A rural teacher housing program would not only help alleviate an immediate problem, it would help the state recognize just how important adequate teacher housing is toward success in the village classroom. It would provide a roadmap to follow into the future.

Thank you for your time.

QUESTIONS FOR CARL ROSE, ASSOCIATION OF ALASKA SCHOOL BOARDS

1. What has the State done recently to address rural teacher housing in Alaska?

Answer: Under pressure from the State supreme court, proposition C passed in November 2002. General obligation bonds are paying for $170 million in rural school construction and major maintenance projects. A debt reimbursement program was also implemented for communities with taxing authority. Funding for new schools and major maintenance meant that, for some rural districts, funds could be freed up elsewhere in the budget to address other priorities, including housing needs.

In 2003 the Alaska Legislature passed S. 25 establishing within the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation a teachers and nurses housing loan program to assist public school teachers and registered nurses to purchase housing with no down payment. Loans are for owner-occupied, single-family housing and may be made only

to an individual employed full-time in a public school in the state who is required to be certificated and holds a position as a teacher, counselor, principal, vice or assistant principal, provider of special education or related services, or as a registered nurse and is licensed to practice registered nursing. The loan can be up to 100 percent of the value of the property. The legislature appropriated $2.1 million within the capital budget to pay for the program. This year, Governor Murkowski is proposing to revamp the program to make it more user friendly for school districts.

2. Why do so many districts appear unable to take steps to ensure teachers have adequate housing?

Answer: It's really a matter of priorities. School districts have been managing decline for well over a decade in Alaska. Schools are faced with trying to protect the basic educational program. For example, trying to attract a new k–12 math teacher takes precedent. The $10,000 earmarked for housing renovations may be better spent on a travel stipend to attract a few quality teachers to the community. Housing needs get put on the back burner.

3. Doesn't Alaska have reserve funds that could be used to address rural teacher housing needs?

Answer: It is true that Alaska has a Permanent Fund—a State savings account that pays dividends to residents. It is currently valued at $28 billion. Like most funding sources, however, the Permanent Fund has strings attached. The Permanent Fund is constitutionally protected. Alaskans are currently debating whether or not to use earnings from the fund to pay for government services. We have been down this road before-unsuccessfully.

4. Other States have rural areas. What is unique about Alaska's rural areas that make the issue of teacher housing so challenging?

Answer: The cultural differences are many. There is the language barrier: English is still a second language in some areas. How you make eye contact matters. How fast you talk matters. How much time you give to a person when waiting for a response. . . matters.

Construction and maintenance in permafrost conditions present their own set of obstacles. There is a short construction season dictated by the weather.

Distance: Replacing an oil stove part may require flying the piece in to the village. You cannot run down the street to the nearest hardware store in a village of 200 people, with no paved roads and perhaps only 1 or 2 vehicles, and expect it to be stocked as if it were a community of 80,000.

Living conditions: Living in a plywood cabin with a barrel stove, without paved roads, with one village sewage lagoon, may seem like third world living conditions to some, but it is the standard in some villages where only 100 years ago the indigenous people were nomadic. The challenges it poses to attracting and retaining quality educators are considerable.

Safety: In many rural areas there is no police protection, only Village Public Safety Officers.

5. How can we help you? What can we do to best address rural teacher housing in Alaska?

Answer: This is a great first step. Highlight the issue. Create a housing program that is workable and easy for districts to participate in. Make it a priority. Then fund it.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROGER SAMPSON, COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Many of Alaska's remote, rural school districts face chronic teacher shortages. Each year districts must actively recruit educators to fill as many as half of the available teaching jobs. For the most part, the educators that take the positions are new to the teaching profession and have no experience with the unique cultures and lifestyle found in rural Alaska. It is difficult for the teachers to adapt to life in remote villages, and most teachers do not stay long.

The lack of availability of quality housing is certainly one issue that teachers note when they leave remote districts. Teachers rarely can find private living quarters, and when they are able to share apartments or housing they are forced to pay extremely high rent for substandard living conditions. In extreme cases, teachers and administrators are unable to find any housing, and are forced to live at the school.

The high teacher turnover rate in rural villages is one of several factors that negatively impacts student performance. There is a direct link between high turnover rates and low proficiency on State assessments. In fact, our lowest performing schools in the State are found in rural Alaska. As we work to reform the education

system, we must find ways to help our rural districts attract highly qualified educators, and keep them in the districts once they are hired.

I believe that the Rural Teacher Housing Act is a critical tool to help turn the tide in Alaska's remote school districts. It will certainly help districts meet one of the major challenges they face in attracting educators. I urge you to support this legislation.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER SIMON, SUPERINTENDENT

Thank you for your interest and involvement in education issues in rural Alaska and for working to address our concerns related to teacher housing. I welcome the opportunity to provide support for S. 1905 and share experiences of providing teacher housing with you.

The Yukon-Koyukuk School District covers the Western interior of Alaska, an area of 65,000 square miles. Geographically, the district is larger than the state of Washington. Our schools serve nine villages of about 1,650 people with 430 school-aged children in grades K–12. More than 90 percent of the students are Koyukon or Tanana Athabaskan Indians. Except for Minto and Manley Hot Springs, travel to and from our schools is by scheduled commuter or charter air service. Raven Correspondence School is a statewide correspondence program, which embraces 1,399 students and their families.

Y-KSD is a Rural Educational Attendance Area [REAA] whose schools are governed by the Regional School Board elected by voters of the communities under the laws of the State of Alaska. Y-KSD employs 64 certified teachers, administrators and specialists, most of whom are endorsed in their field of placement.

Y-KSD is an equal opportunity agency whose programs and employment are available to all qualified individuals regardless of race, creed, gender, disability or country of origin. Y-KSD, as per Federal law, is a gun-free and drug-free place for learning and working.

According to standardized test scores over the last 13 years, the students at our village sites performed between the 18th and 40th percentile. Over the last 5 years there has been an increase in the scores, which are currently sitting between the 30th and 40th percentile. Under the Federal law of No Child Left Behind, each school is to meet Adequate Yearly Progress or eventually face sanctions. At this point, four of our five village sites meet AYP, four schools are at AYP Level I, and one is at AYP Level II.

In order to provide a sound education, attain better test results to meet AYP and increase students' test scores, all rural schools need outstanding teachers and principals.

One of our biggest obstacles in providing a sound education is teacher and principal turnover. Between this year and last year, Y-KSD had a 29-percent turnover in teachers and a 44-percent turnover in principals. Three teachers and one school counselor left one or more of our communities since school started in August. Studies have shown that hiring teachers with 3 to 5 years of experience pays the biggest dividends in the classroom. What we have now is rural districts hiring young teachers who stay 2 to 4 years then leave to find employment in an urban district or one that is connected by the road system. We are, in fact, training teachers. We are the ones who need experienced, dedicated teachers for the children under our care.

One of the first questions an interested teacher or principal asks is "Is housing provided? And if so, what is the rent?" Not long afterward is the question: "Do I have to share housing?" Adequate teacher housing is vital to the success of our students. Unfortunately, the choice of spending scarce resources for classroom equipment and supplies or for teacher housing is something we face every year. Y-KSD would rather not be in the business of teacher housing because it is being operated at a loss. Ten years ago, Y-KSD gave half of its teacher housing to a village corporation free of charge. Last summer, this same corporation gave the last housing unit back to the district. Providing housing is a time-consuming and financial burden to any organization. However, Y-KSD provides this service at a loss so quality teachers may be hired to teacher the children of this district.

The issue of substandard teacher housing is raised in this bill. Yes, this is an issue this district faces. Two years ago, Y-KSD provided a rental free-of-charge to a couple and their two young children. This district did not want to be held responsible if any harm came to this young family due to the condition of the building. Currently, two teachers are renting a duplex that is 29 years old and very inefficient. The estimated operational cost is $247,000 over the next 6 years. Four years ago, in another village, Y-KSD purchased a house which included a storage shed. This same shed had been converted to a housing unit. Three years ago, a young man

and his daughter lived in the school for 2 months before finding a local house to rent.

This district has been trying to meet the housing needs of its teachers. But in doing so, it takes funds and maintenance time away from the schools. Since 2000, Y-KSD spent $702,138 on housing instead of the classroom.

The cost of constructing a two bedroom, one bathroom house in 2002 was $169,000. Included in this cost is the purchase price of $99,677, and $69,992 for freight, construction, and utility hook-ups. An estimated 17 rental units in six communities are required to meet our teacher housing needs in the next few years. Y-KSD simply does not have the amount of funds necessary to build housing.

In closing, teacher housing is a necessity for rural districts, usually operated at a loss and takes scarce resources away from the school. Thank you again for your interest and concern.

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