

SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE
SKAGWAY SCHOOL DISTRICT
P.O. Box 497, Skagway, AK 99840, (907) 983-2960

May 29, 2020

Dear Finance Committee, Mayor Cremata & Skagway Assembly,

On behalf of the Skagway School Board and the families we represent, I want to express our strenuous objection to the amendments proposed by the Finance Committee to the Emergency Assistance and Economic Stimulus Program. The proposed amendments will negatively impact both the employees of the district as well as the children we serve. Several of our employees work between 20-30 hours per week in a number of different capacities to create an optimal learning environment for our students. Under one of the proposed amendments that disqualifies residents who work more than 20 hours per week, I envision a scenario in which employees find themselves in the heart wrenching position of refusing work, work that they clearly love, and thereby limiting services to students in order to qualify for an assistance payment. The board and I work tirelessly to create a community of learning that engages students and stimulates growth and a sense of purpose in our staff, this amendment would drive a wedge into the altruistic nature of our organization.

The amendment precluding eligibility for children under the age of 14 seems both arbitrary and illogical. This summer has been hard on every resident of Skagway, I fear for what this winter will bring for all of us. Establishing an age restriction on a community assistance program carries with it the unintended consequence of creating a system of 'haves and have nots'. So many of our families are going to struggle to make it through this winter, it seems absurd to draw lines of division between kids in the same household and perhaps in the same classroom. No matter the age, all of our children will need food, shelter, heat, and electricity this winter. To ascribe to a system of community assistance that imposes a measure of uncertainty amid any of what Dr. Abraham Maslow refers to as 'the hierarchy of needs' will negatively impact the mental health of our kids as well as their academic achievement. Indeed, it is in part because our community has historically met the needs of our students that we have performed so admirably. We view the current situation no differently, our community has needs and we have the ability to meet those needs without condition; not a portion of our community, our entire community.

A cacophony of sentiments and platitudes have emerged in our community and a common mantra has surfaced that 'we are all in this together'. The Skagway School Board and I genuinely support this concept and because we believe in an inclusive and supportive philosophy, we support the passage of Resolution 20-22R as currently drafted. Several families have already confided in us that without assistance on the scale described in the resolution that they may very well have to leave town. Losing families would not only devastate the culture and character of our school, it would also have major implications when it comes to school funding. We implore you to do what is right for the entirety of Skagway, not just those that qualify under a restrictive set of prerequisites. Thank you for your service and your consideration of this correspondence.

Respectfully,

Dr. Joshua B. Coughran
Superintendent
Skagway School District