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Testimony Submitted to the US Senate HELP Committee

The Honorable Senator Murkowski & Committee Members:

I have been asked to bring testimony specifically regarding the experiences of Alaska Union training programs in K-12 and postsecondary education, and to offer some recommendations from these experiences to help improve the high school completion rate and advance Alaska's youth into and through postsecondary technical training or college.

Alaska Works Partnership, Inc was formed in 1997 as a not-for-profit by Alaska's Construction Trade Unions and their Joint Administered Apprenticeship and Training Trusts, commonly referred to as JATC's. Alaska Works was created to attract and prepare Alaskan's for jobs and careers in construction. Our more than 10 years of experience of reaching out to schools and students, employers and industry associations, Alaska Native organizations and others to build that workforce do provide some insights for increasing the retention of Alaskans students in life-long learning from K-16.

Alaska's trade unions have more than 50 years of experience working in schools to attract students to trade apprenticeship and career training. Once a student completes high school they have met the 1st requirement for applying to these coveted and highly competitive positions.

Alaska's trade union apprenticeship programs, collectively, are the states largest private funded industry training partnership in Alaska. Over the past decade, union members and employers have invested more than \$60 million in training Alaskans. This year their apprenticeship programs will invest more than \$10 million for industry training. No other industry has invested as much or worked as long to develop sustainable partnerships with secondary and postsecondary education in Alaska.

There are 31 Joint Administered Apprenticeship and Training Trusts operating in the state and they teach over 20 specific construction crafts and trade skills. There are more than 800 employers contributing funds to the system for every hour a union member works. JATCs own and operate 14 fully staffed trade schools where course related instruction takes place and are building one new training center a year for the past 5 years to meet the ever growing needs of their programs.

Their combined capital assets in facilities and training equipment are estimated at over \$30 million. Today they train more than 2000 registered apprentices, which is more than 80% of active apprentices registered in the state. These schools turn out more than 95% of the Alaska journeymen certified by the US Department of Labor and have for many decades.

The high school drop-out rate significantly impacts the construction industry, particularly as it continues to aggressively recruit new workers to meet growing job demand, to replace retiring skilled workers, and to replace trades workers advancing into supervisory and management positions. Adding to the skills gap, currently 80% of those employed in Alaska's construction industry are non-residents who come here to earn the high wages. We'd like to see more of Alaska's high school graduates get those jobs.

The drop-out challenge strikes at the very core of a strong construction industry because Alaska's high schools are the main provider of workers for the supply chain.

Many years ago educators and trade unions and the federal government agreed that completing high school should be a basic requirement for applying to a Joint-Administered apprenticeship program. Educators, unions and employers agreed setting graduation as the bar would keep more young people in school better prepare them for success after school.

The reduced supply of talent ready to learn a trade skill means the construction industry must compete harder with other industries, postsecondary technical institutions, colleges and universities, and the military for future workers. Supplying a new construction workforce to meet increasing job demand to build Alaska and build the Alaska Natural Gas Pipeline is a daunting challenge. But we are finding new ways to turn that around and keep kids in school by getting them into vocational training. I am providing two documents to the Committee which help further explain what I mean about those new methods.

I am confident today that through the great relationships established by and between labor and education at all levels, particularly with the University of Alaska and School Districts, we can make a difference. These new initiatives and expanding industry education and labor partnerships have only been possible through investments by the federal and state government, which is explained in the documents I have provided.

One thing is evident. Students need education that is relevant, flexible and career oriented. We need to start vocational and career education activities earlier in the education process. Students de-select careers at an early age. They need to have some career awareness and career activities to keep them informed about the jobs educators are preparing them for.

We need to bring more applied math and technical reading into every classroom. We did in the old days through vocational education and co-operative learning. This will improve math and science scores and help students who learn in different ways get the knowledge they need to advance. For many, it will become a reason they go to school.

We need to offer public secondary and postsecondary schools flexible and dedicated long term funding specifically for career and technical training in conjunction with industry partners. Somewhat like Carl Perkins but not as cumbersome, costly to the schools, or meager from the source. These should be grants that align secondary and postsecondary credit with industry certificates and college degrees, and put students in jobs and careers vital to the regional economies.

I commend to the Committee the Alaska Construction Academies, as explained in one document before you, the partnerships and results of working with Alaska's high schools as one program that can bring insights for success in other areas.

I hope my comments have been helpful. I look forward to the opportunity to participate with the panel in this important discussion. And I thank you for providing me an opportunity to testify.

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