

**Statement of Peggy Hersrud**  
**Bicameral Task Force of Climate Change Forum**  
**January 14, 2014**

Good morning, my name is **Peggy Hersrud** and I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today.

My family and I moved away from Shishmaref 8 years ago, and moved back this year in June. I remember one time before we left, in 2004: there was a huge storm, and we had to move all of our belongings out of our house and into another building the land underneath our home building was starting to wash away. After the storm, we repaired the erosion with sand, but the following summer we started to have to build a seawall.

In the 7 years that we were gone, huge amounts of land was lost. Today, we live in the same building that we had lived in before, but it looks totally different. About 6 years ago, there was a playground and about 50-60 feet of land behind our house. This year, the water is literally in our backyard. It is only about 20 feet away now.

The impacts are becoming a regular seasonal challenge. A storm last fall washed away the road to the dump. We had to wait until freeze up to use it - in the meantime, we had to hold on to our trash.

In one storm, we can lose about 20 feet of our island in an hour. The water undercuts the land, eroding the foundation of our island. The topsoil, along with our buildings, then fall into the ocean. Our island is only a ¾ miles wide by 3 miles to begin with. Storms are becoming more frequent and more severe. We used to get one big storm every year – in recent years, we have gotten two or three. These are putting our island at serious risk for completely disappearing.

But it isn't just our land that is degrading. My husband is the principal at Shishmaref school, and climate change is having a direct impact on our children's education.

Our school district refuses to fund the Shishmaref school for upgrades to teacher housing, or for our school facilities. The reason is because Shishmaref is on a flood plain, and the risks of flooding are becoming too great to justify the cost, in their opinion. Our children are taking classes in portables, even as the class sizes are growing. And our teachers are living in shared housing – 4 male teachers in a 3 bedroom house, and 3 female teachers in a 3 bedroom house. Our teachers are living without running water, while all other schools in the district give each teachers their own apartment. These conditions are preventing us from being able to keep good teachers, and are undermining our children's education, and their future.

I am worried about my family. I have three kids and it's hard to think about how all it takes is one good storm – it's scary. I think a lot about how we are going to have to leave everything we own and worked hard for.

That's why we are here this week. To tell our story, and make sure politicians like you know what's going on. So hopefully you can do something – to address climate change at a national level, and help protect our community at a local level.