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Sponsor Statement

SSHB 20

SSHB 20, "An Act relating to appropriations for operating expenses for primary and secondary public education; and providing for an effective date" would let school districts know the amount of state foundation funding they will receive for the succeeding school year by March 15th of each calendar year.

Under the current funding structure schools often do not know the state's contribution to their budget until after the end of the legislative session. This forces schools to layoff non-tenured teachers and rehire them after the budget has been approved. Schools lose good teachers who look elsewhere for a job due to the uncertain status of their employment. This layoff-rehire cycle is disruptive and demoralizing to our schools and teachers.

AS 14.14.060 requires school districts to submit funding requests to their municipal governments by the first of May every year. School districts must estimate the amount of state funding they will receive because the legislature and governor generally do not pass their operating budget until well after May 1st. This makes it difficult for school districts to prepare an actual fiscal plan and puts the additional burden of uncertainty on local government officials developing their budgets.

SSHB 20 solves this problem in two ways. First, it requires the governor to submit a separate appropriation bill to the legislature for public elementary and secondary schools before the fourth day of each regular session. The legislature must then pass and transmit to the governor a bill to fund education for the succeeding fiscal year by the fifteenth of March. Second, SSHB 20 changes the date that school districts are required to notify tenured teachers of layoff from March 15 to March 25. This gives the governor 10 days to act and gives schools ten days from passage of their funding to determine any necessary layoffs.

Alaska's children deserve the best we can give them. Early funding of education is one way the legislature can help school districts achieve their goal of providing a stable and friendly educational environment conducive to learning.