

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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SPONSOR STATEMENT

Senate Joint Resolution 9 Constitutional Amendment: Education Funding

Senate Joint Resolution 9, if passed by both bodies of the legislature, places a constitutional amendment before the voters in the general election in the fall of 2014. This ballot proposal provides voters a chance to amend the Alaska Constitution to allow the use of public money for the benefit of all Alaskans seeking educational/training aid, regardless of whether individuals enroll in public or private institutions.

Currently the Alaska Constitution prohibits the use of public funds for the direct benefit of any private educational institution. The courts have determined that this ban extends to state funds being allotted to individual Alaskans who choose to attend a private school. Meanwhile an increasing number of Alaskans are questioning the constitutionality of the long-standing practice of giving educational scholarships/grants to adults for educational and training purposes while denying children the same funding opportunities.

Passage of SJR 9 clarifies the question on the constitutionality of current educational practices. More than that, the ballot question allows the voters to decide whether to maintain or abolish the restrictions on the use of public dollars for the education of children. SJR 9 gives the voters the power to decide what is right for them, their families and the State of Alaska.

It is important to note that even with the adoption of this constitutional amendment by a majority of voters, the Legislature still needs to have a robust discussion on how to go forward. These deliberations will occur before any Alaskan child receives state funds to attend a private educational institution. The passage of SJR 9 allows these discussions to begin.

I strongly favor giving Alaskan voters, the very voters who elected each and every one of us, an opportunity to vote on this issue. Please join me in support of SJR 9.