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US Senate Indian Affairs Committee Hearing on  
Sen. Murkowski's Rural Teacher Housing Bill S.1905  
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9:00 a.m.

Good morning, my name is Peggy Cole and I am a teacher in the Lower Yukon School District (LYSD), located in western Alaska. LYSD consists of 11 sites spread along the Yukon River and the Bering seacoast covering approximately 22,000 sq.mi. There are about 2000 students, 99% of which are Yupik Eskimo. I have taught in LYSD for 12 years and have lived in teacher housing during that time. My family and I have lived in 3 villages in our school district. At each site, we have lived in BIA housing units, which are 50 or more years old. These houses had many problems and were in need of costly repairs.

There are virtually no houses available to rent in the villages, and what is available, would be considered substandard by most teachers. Therefore, the school district rents the houses to the teachers, who are required to live in District housing as part of their contract. The school district picks up the cost of water, sewer, electricity and maintenance. According to the District, the high cost of these utilities leaves little revenue for maintenance on the housing.

The cost of living in rural Alaska is very high compared to Anchorage. Here is a simple example, milk costs about \$3.50 in Anchorage, it costs \$8.98 in Emmonak and it is not even available in many villages. Supplies of all types must be flown into the village during the year, or barged in during the summer months. There are no roads connecting western Alaska to a hub where supplies can be purchased and delivered in a cheaper manner.

While working in this school district, I have had the opportunity to visit many of the 104 teacher housing units throughout the district. Most of them were in fair to poor condition. Only 8 new, teacher housing units have been constructed in the past 12 years in our district. During the summer of 1996, as a cost saving measure, the District purchased 3 mobile homes and barged them to Hooper Bay to act as teacher housing. That did not work at all. They were

cold and drafty; the walls cracked and there were problems with the water/sewer lines.

The school district wants to keep the rent at a reasonable price in order to attract and retain quality teachers to provide stability in the classrooms, but building new houses in rural Alaska is extremely costly. As a "Band-Aid" to the problem, LYSD spent over \$1,000,000 from their CIP fund to upgrade the existing housing throughout the District last summer. These upgrades have helped to make the houses look more pleasing to the eye, but have not solved the problems with structural, electrical, water/sewer issues or age of the units.

At some sites, single teachers are required to live together because of the scarcity of adequate housing units. This does not promote stability of teaching staffs at some schools, because many teachers do not want to live with a total stranger.

With the added stress to the budget of the new NCLB law, the increase to PERS/TRS and the increasing cost of insurance, there is no money available in our district to do any more upgrades on teacher housing.

Bill S.1905, Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2003, which Senator Murkowski is sponsoring, would make monies available to these rural districts, like LYSD. This money would allow our district to build new teacher housing units, which would help to entice teachers to come to rural Alaska to work. The passage of this bill would also allow the district to get the needed money to bring all of our housing units up to the rigid standards of today's world. I strongly encourage you to support Senator Murkowski in her efforts to get Bill S.1905 passed.