

March 4, 2019

Dear Governor Dunleavy, Representative Edgmon, Senator Giessel, Representative Foster, Representative Wilson, Senator Stedman, and Senator von Imhof,

As professional societies representing tens of thousands of faculty members and students from humanistic and social scientific disciplines, including many in Alaska, we express deep concern about Governor Dunleavy's proposed funding cuts for higher education. While we understand that Alaska is currently facing financial constraints, a \$134 million reduction in state support for the University of Alaska will undoubtedly have devastating consequences to the well-being of the state for generations to come.

Higher education is a critical engine for individual economic well-being and for local, state, and national economies. College graduates earn more, are less likely to be poor, and are less likely to rely on public assistance than others. According to the 2017 American Community Survey, Alaskans with a bachelor's degree earn an average of \$56,914 per year, compared to \$41,758 for those with an associate degree or some college, and \$35,868 for high school graduates. Moreover, according to a study of high school graduates by the Alaskan Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the vast majority of those who attended college in Alaska continue to reside in the state ten years after graduation, while the vast majority of those who left the state for higher education did not return. A healthy local system ensures that many of the economic benefits of higher education remain local. Further, higher education helps to ensure a local workforce with the capacity to respond to rapidly changing economic, political, and social contexts.

The proposed budget cuts would shift the costs of higher education in Alaska even more heavily to students and their families. Data from the State Higher Education Executive Officers show that between 2008 and 2017, net tuition revenue per student at Alaska's public institutions increased 26 percent. The proposed 41 percent budget cut would necessitate additional and more significant tuition increases and still require the elimination of programs and services. University President James Johnsen has estimated that more than 1,000 faculty and staff would have to be laid off to accommodate such big cuts. Undoubtedly, this would significantly lower enrollments, with a corresponding decline in tuition revenue, and put the system in an untenable situation with respect to retaining high quality faculty.

Investment in a robust system of higher education is an investment in the public good that extends beyond economics. The university's mission is to inspire learning and to advance and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, and public service, emphasizing the North and its diverse peoples. If Alaska's higher education system is decimated, it will have not only negative economic consequences, but negative consequences on the broader social well-being of individuals and communities in Alaska.

We know you face difficult choices in developing a responsible and responsive budget that meets the complex needs of Alaska's citizens. As you make these choices, we urge

you to consider the value of higher education, the many contributions higher education makes to the well-being of Alaska, and the severe negative consequences to reducing investment in higher education.

If you would like to follow up with questions or comments on any of these issues, please contact Teresa Ciabattari, PhD, Director of Research, Professional Development, and Academic Affairs at the American Sociological Association. She can be reached at tciabattari@asanet.org or 202.247.9840.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Religion
American Anthropological Association
American Association of Geographers
American Dialect Society
American Folklore Society
American Historical Association
American Musicological Society
American Philosophical Association
American Political Science Association
American Schools of Oriental Research
American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies
American Society for Environmental History
American Society of Comparative Law
American Sociological Association
American Studies Association
Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies
Association of College and Research Libraries
College Art Association
Dance Studies Association
History of Science Society
Latin American Studies Association
Linguistic Society of America
Middle East Studies Association
Modern Language Association
National Communication Association
National Council on Public History
Organization of American Historians
Sixteenth Century Society and Conference
Society for Ethnomusicology
Society of Architectural Historians
Society for Cinema and Media Studies
World History Association