

**Jennifer Davis, Technology Trainer, Northwest Arctic Borough School District**  
**U.S. Senate Indian Affairs Committee Hearing on S.1905,**  
**Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2003**  
**Tuesday, March 16, 2004**

I have lived in Kotzebue, Alaska for the past 5 years and work as an itinerant technology trainer in the 11 villages of Northwest Arctic. There is no school district provided housing in Kotzebue. We must locate our own housing in the community and then pay extremely high costs for what many consider to be substandard conditions. I live in a 250 square foot apartment that costs \$1050 a month. I feel lucky that I was able to find an apartment that is clean and in good repair. There is a shortage of housing in Kotzebue that makes it difficult to find adequate housing. Many people who move here take anything they can find available, sight unseen. They often arrive to find the apartment or house they have rented filthy and in need of work to make repairs but they cannot move elsewhere because there isn't anything else. When I moved to Kotzebue, I rented my first apartment over the phone and arrived to find the furnished apartment very dirty, lacking furniture, and sinking into the permafrost on one side. I cleaned the apartment as best I could, sealed a broken window with plywood and made my new home as comfortable as possible but I did not feel like Kotzebue would be my home for long. Luckily, I found another apartment just before the end of my first school year that even though small is comfortable and clean. My only complaint now is the excessive cost of housing in Kotzebue. I would like to move into a larger place but cannot afford to do so. My current rent is about a third of my salary each month.

My job takes me to each of the villages surrounding Kotzebue where I stay with other teachers while I am there. There is some district owned teacher housing in each of the 10 villages. The quality of this housing varies greatly from village to village. Buckland, Kivalina, Noatak, Noorvik, and Shungnak have school district housing for all teachers but many are living with roommates when they would prefer not to if more housing were available. In Ambler, Deering, Kiana, Kobuk, and Selawik there is school district housing for the school administrator and some of the teachers. The district leases housing from

the community if there is not enough district housing. In the villages that will allow it, some of the teachers have purchased or built their own homes. Some of the housing does not have plumbing and many of the units are badly in need of renovations and repairs. Some teachers have reported unsafe conditions in or around their apartments. We had a teacher injured from a fall due to a leak in her ceiling that has been there for over a year and not been repaired. Some of our teachers haul their own water and oil for their houses and a few are still dealing with honey-buckets.

The Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2003 would help the district in attracting and retaining quality educators. We currently have about a 30% turnover each year and housing conditions and cost are a large part of the reason people leave. Each year, as I think about signing my contract and create a list of positives and negatives, housing is the only thing in the negative column for me. This act would make it possible for the district to build and provide housing for Kotzebue educators, which would allow more people to feel able to make it their home. Our villages need more housing to be built and for serious renovations to be made. Many educators move to Northwest Arctic with the intent of making it their home but if they do not have adequate, comfortable, affordable housing they will not stay. The high teacher turnover that we currently have is hard on the children in the region and I think anything we can do to improve teacher retention will benefit our kids.