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July 16, 2026

Dear Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities and Alaska Marine Highway System Leadership,

I am writing on behalf of the Cordova School District regarding the proposed Winter 2026–2027 Alaska Marine Highway System schedule. We recognize and appreciate the difficult decisions involved in maintaining an aging fleet while operating within limited funding and vessel availability. We understand that annual overhauls are necessary to ensure the long-term safety and reliability of the system.

Our concern is not with the need for maintenance, but with how the burden of those maintenance schedules is distributed. Under the proposed schedule, Prince William Sound would be without ferry service from October 1 through March 6—approximately five months. This places a disproportionate share of the statewide service reductions on one region and one transportation corridor.

Historically, Cordova has planned for two to three months without ferry service while our vessel undergoes annual maintenance. Last winter, that interruption extended to approximately three and a half months, creating significant financial and operational challenges for both our school district and our community. Extending that interruption to five months will create impacts that we simply cannot absorb.

For the 2026–2027 school year, the Cordova School District has 17 student activity trips planned during the proposed period without ferry service. These experiences include academic, athletic, and extracurricular opportunities that serve approximately 415 students throughout the year. These trips have been budgeted assuming continued access to the Alaska Marine Highway System.

Without ferry service, our only viable transportation option is air travel. We estimate that replacing those ferry trips with airfare will increase our transportation costs by approximately **\$80,925**—funding that is not available within our current budget. As a result, we estimate that as many as **294 students** would lose opportunities to participate in educational experiences that broaden their learning, strengthen school engagement, and connect them with students across Alaska. Students in a roadless community should not lose educational opportunities because of transportation decisions beyond their control.

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The financial impact extends beyond airfare. Increased costs for hotel accommodations, vehicle rentals, baggage, and freight further strain limited school resources. Families are less able to accompany students, reducing community participation and support. These losses affect not only school budgets but also student morale, educational opportunity, and our ability to provide equitable experiences for students living in a roadless community.

Cordova depends on the Alaska Marine Highway System in the same way many Alaskans depend on the state's highway system. For our community, the ferry is not simply a convenience—it is essential public infrastructure that supports education, healthcare, commerce, and family connections.

We recognize that fleet repairs, vessel replacements, and terminal improvements are critical investments in the future of AMHS. However, while those improvements are underway, we respectfully ask the Department to consider a more balanced deployment of the active fleet so that no single region bears such an extended loss of service. Even periodic winter service would substantially reduce the educational and economic impacts on our students and community.

Thank you for considering our comments and for your continued work to strengthen Alaska's marine transportation system. We respectfully request that the proposed winter schedule be revised to provide periodic winter service to Prince William Sound through alternative vessel deployment and a more equitable distribution of service reductions statewide.

Sincerely,

Kim Hanisch

Kim Hanisch
Superintendent
Cordova School District