



To whom it may concern,

The Alaska Public Interest Research Group (AKPIRG) is writing in support of HB310, as it will provide much needed immediate relief to Alaskan consumers in the face of a global pandemic and acute economic disaster.

AKPIRG, established in 1974, is Alaska's only non-profit, non-partisan consumer and public interest advocate. During the COVID-19 crisis, we have been talking with individual consumers, compiling a statewide community resources list, and talking with consumer policy experts around the US to determine the best course of action to ensure that consumers are not harmed in the long-term by the economic crisis created by this pandemic.

Currently, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, 23% of Alaska renter households are extremely low income, and 72% of those households are severely cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing expenses, including rent and utilities. As access to capital becomes increasingly scarce, Alaskans already on the brink of homelessness will be unable to cover their essential costs.

According to a 2018 report by the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty evictions, whether through formal court proceedings or other methods of involuntary displacement from housing, are a direct cause of homelessness—either immediately or after social safety networks

are exhausted. The causal relationship between evictions and homelessness has been demonstrated in a number national studies.

Houselessness has a devastating effect on individuals, families, communities, and the State of Alaska. Food insecurity, domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse can lead to homelessness, and certainly are exponentially exacerbated by living without permanent housing, according to the Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness. If being homeless results in higher exposure to disease, then any measure that keeps families housed are measures that prevent the spread of COVID-19 and also prevent longer-term economic hardship for those families, who otherwise would turn to social programs that are already stretched thin dealing with this crisis.

By ensuring housing stability, HB310 relieves a burden for social work organizations who are already struggling to protect a vulnerable section of the population as well as preventing illness and therefore allowing added capacity to hospitals that will need every available bed as this pandemic spreads. These provisions are needed immediately. Alaskans are scared, and rightly so. This is not everything that needs to be done to protect consumers, but it is an important step.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'V' followed by a stylized, cursive-like flourish that ends in a long horizontal line.

Veri di Suvero

Executive Director, AKPIRG