



ALASKA STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees Local 52

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

House Labor & Commerce Committee
Alaska State Capitol - Barnes 124

March 15, 2021

Dear Co-Chair Fields, Co-Chair Spohnholz, and Committee Members:

My name is Jake Metcalfe. I'm the Executive Director of the Alaska State Employees Association (ASEA), AFSCME Local 52. ASEA represents approximately 8,000 hard-working public employees that deliver the critical services Alaskans rely on every day.

Last year, essential workers, including our members, were asked to put themselves and their families at risk to keep Alaska running by ensuring critical services continued. Public employees are asked to rise above and go beyond - to keep the lights on, keep our roads cleared, ensure our water is clean and safe, that children and families in need are cared for; they look out for our most vulnerable populations with pride and dedication.

This year was no different. The pandemic caught all of us off guard. Organizations across the country realized that pandemic preparedness was not in many people's rule books. The State of Alaska was no exception. All the while, as organizations and governments worked hard to respond to the novel coronavirus pandemic, our essential workers never stopped working. They couldn't because their work was and continues to be essential.

The pandemic that we stumbled through revealed numerous gaps in the safety net we cast for Alaska's working people. This bill will help fill one of the holes in our safety net by providing a remedy for frontline workers and their families if they contract a pandemic disease. Several of our members, especially those that work in corrections and 24-hour facilities, have personal stories they can share about their working conditions and exposure to the virus.

We asked these dedicated Alaskans to take major risks to keep Alaska running. I ask that this Legislature think about those workers and pass this important legislation so that those risks are met with some relief for the worker and their family.

In conclusion, HB 45 is critical towards ensuring that we are taking care of the essential workers that are taking care of us. This bill is just one step that will fill a gap that became too wide and too consuming as essential workers fell ill with little to no relief. Families should not feel forced to choose between their health or safety and earning a living. While this bill can't protect dedicated essential employees against contracting a pandemic disease, it will offer them the relief they will need if they do suffer from a pandemic illness.

HB 45 is a way to ensure essential workers in Alaska are cared for as they are being asked to care for Alaskans. Please pass HB 45.

In Solidarity,

Jake Metcalfe
Executive Director
ASEA/AFSCME Local 52

