

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



To:
Commissioner Tamika Ledbetter
Department of Labor & Workforce Development
Office of the Commissioner
P.O. Box 111149
Juneau, AK 99811
<Delivered Electronically>

March 5, 2021

Commissioner Ledbetter,

It has come to our attention that after recent news coverage of your decision to block fines against seafood processing plants that failed to meet COVID-19 workplace safety standards, rather than seeking to alter your decisions in favor of increased workplace safety, you have instead turned your focus to identifying and potentially retaliating against the employees in question.

This is in conflict with your statement in a January 18, 2021 letter that, "As the leader of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the Chief Safety Officers for the State, workplace safety is my highest responsibility."

We agree that workplace safety is your highest responsibility. As Alaska's Chief Safety Officer we believe that, in turning your attention to an internal investigation of potential whistleblowers, rather than on the decision to not ensure the safety of Alaska's seafood processing workers, you are failing to live up to your legal responsibility to the workers of Alaska.

Further, an effort to focus on an internal investigation to hold a(n) employee(s) responsible for releasing this information is very likely a violation of the Alaska Whistleblower Act. Alaska's Whistleblower Act "protects public employees who report to public bodies on matters of public concern from retaliation by their employers." Protected activities under the Act include reporting a public concern to a public body. If Department of Labor and Workforce Development employee(s) blew the whistle on your obstruction of essential enforcement activities related to a highly infectious disease, and shared their concerns with members of the legislature, that would be a clear cut case of protected whistleblower activities under the Act. With that information in mind, please cease and desist any further attempts to intimidate, interrogate, or otherwise retaliate against employee(s) of your department who you believe to be whistleblowers.

We look forward to working with you to ensure the workplace safety of Alaska's workers in every sector of our economy. We again extend our invitation to you to attend the House Labor and Commerce

Committee meeting on the topic of workforce safety in the seafood industry on Wednesday, March 10th at 5:45pm. Keeping Alaskans working in safe workplace environments should be all of our jobs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in brown ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'Z' followed by a horizontal line.

Rep. Zack Fields
House Labor and Commerce Committee Co-Chairs

A handwritten signature in blue ink, written in a cursive style.

Rep. Ivy Spohnholz