

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR

## **House Resolution 8 “Creating the House Task Force on Poverty and Opportunity” Sponsor Statement**

House Resolution 8 would create a House Task Force on Poverty and Opportunity, consisting of 23 members from the Alaska State House, members of the public, and outside experts representing community groups, local and tribal government, and other important stakeholders. The Speaker of the House will choose the members of this task force, which will provide a report and policy recommendations to the legislature and the public.

The 2019 poverty rate in Alaska was 10.1%, but this burden disproportionately affected our communities of color. In Alaska, 14.2% of African-Americans, 10.8% of Latinx-Americans, and 24% of Alaska Native people lived in poverty in 2019. Alaska Native people have experienced the highest rates of poverty statewide, with the Alaska Native poverty rate averaging around 28% for the last 15 years.

This statewide issue of poverty has only been exacerbated by the financial crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in a state that depends so heavily on seasonal tourism and fishing. According to the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Alaska’s January 2021 employment numbers were down 7.4% from January 2020 – a loss of 23,000 jobs.

However, employment status is not the sole determinant of poverty. Systemic and structural injustices, food security and subsistence rights, housing, education, economic development, intergenerational trauma, and cultural competency are just a few of the many factors that contribute to poverty and income inequality – and the House Task Force on Poverty and Opportunity would bring together a diverse team of experts that would speak to these various components.

In summation, HR 8 would convene a task force to analyze the current needs of our most vulnerable communities and provide up-to-date resources that can inform the priorities of decisionmakers in our state.

I respectfully ask for your support in the passage of HR 8.