



February 23, 2026

Community and Regional Affairs Committee
Alaska House of Representatives

Subject: Statement in support of Amending AS 18.62.010, an act relating to the exemption for a Certificate of Fitness in communities of less than 2,500 population.

Co-Chairs Representative Himschoot and Representative Mears,

AVEC is interested in amending AS 18.62.010 to clarify when a Certificate of Fitness is required by linemen working on electric distribution facilities in communities of less than 2,500 population. This fix requires no appropriation or fiscal note and would restore the status quo of how power distribution systems have been operated since AVEC was founded in 1968. This proposed legislation will improve reliability and lower cost for maintaining small, isolated power systems in rural Alaska.

Background: Alaska statute (AS 18.62.010) requires that linemen working on facilities subject to the National Electric Safety Code have a Certificate of Fitness from the State of Alaska. There is an exemption to this rule for utilities operating in communities with a population of less than 2,500.

The exemption is presently written so that if the utility has any portion of a city or unified municipality having more than 2,500 population within its service area, the exemption does not apply. AVEC would like to clarify that the exemption would apply to the location being served and not necessarily depend on all the locations served by the utility. AVEC has a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) to provide electricity to 58 remote rural communities, all of which have populations less than 2,500, except for Bethel (6325 pop.) AVEC acquired Bethel Utility Corporation in 2014. AVEC was informed by the Alaska Department of Labor (DOL) earlier this year that because AVEC has Bethel within its service area, AVEC could no longer operate under the exemption in any of the communities it serves. AVEC requested a waiver from the DOL which was denied on the grounds that providing a waiver to state statute was beyond their authority.

Reason for amendment: The communities AVEC serves are remote and isolated. All of them except Minto are accessible only by air or water. As a practical matter, small communities do not typically have resident linemen with Certificates of Fitness. Requiring a Certificate of Fitness to work on distribution facilities in these small communities reduces distribution system maintenance and increases response times when there is a power outage, both counter to the goals of public safety. AVEC has a proven track record of training and work force development that has served small communities well. Requiring a Certificate of Fitness for all work on distribution systems necessitates extensive travel by Certificated linemen to repair minor issues that could be effectively repaired by qualified personnel without a Certificate of Fitness.

The acquisition of Bethel into the AVEC service area has done nothing to alter the physical separation and practical realities of maintaining power distribution systems in the other communities AVEC serves. AVEC has abided by the Certificate of Fitness rule in Bethel since its acquisition and will continue to do so. Amending the exemption in AS 18.62.010 to focus on the qualities of the "location" rather than of the "utility" provides the relief from the burden of requiring a Certificate of Fitness in these small communities and allows local laborers to assist when appropriate; developing valuable skills while serving their community.

This item is of critical importance to AVEC. Our members have already been impacted by delayed responses to outages, increased pressure on the few Certificated linemen we have on staff, and the increased cost for extensive travel mandated by this requirement. I appreciate the committee's consideration of this matter and request expedient deliberation as well as any assistance that can be provided in passing this bill into law.

Sincerely,



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