



ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Representative Genevieve Mina

Chair, House Health and Social Services Committee

Member, House Transportation Committee

Member, House Judiciary Committee

Serving House District 19: Airport Heights, Mountain View, & Russian Jack

HB 188 Sponsor Statement – Version A

"An Act establishing the welcoming Alaska office; establishing the welcoming Alaska center; establishing the Welcoming Alaska Advisory Committee; repealing the office of citizenship assistance; and providing for an effective date."

Alaska jobs are growing in resource development, construction, and health care; and yet, the state's labor market is largely retiring, and prime-working age groups continue to migrate out of state. According to the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) 2026 Jobs Forecast, "nonresidents have provided much of the labor that has allowed Alaska to grow in recent years." At a time of sustained labor shortages and demographic change, Alaska cannot afford to leave talent on the table.

In 2004, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOWLD) established the Office of Citizenship Assistance (OCA) to coordinate training and employment services for legal immigrants and migrant workers. However, this office has stayed dormant until the Dunleavy administration revived the office in 2023. Since its reinvigoration, the office has supported hundreds of Ukrainian refugees and international teachers from the Philippines. Catholic Social Services has also operated the Alaska Office for Refugees (AOR), which provides employment services, resource navigation, medical services, and English language training; this office is now transitioning to the State of Alaska.

While the AOR has successfully supported the self-sufficiency of refugees, the current OCA is narrowly focused on job training for immigrants and fails to create a comprehensive framework to retain all newcomers to Alaska. Over 20 states have established similar offices called "Office of New Americans," providing language access planning, employment navigation, and cross-agency collaboration. State coordination can reduce wasted talent, improve workforce retention, and strengthen economic growth.

House Bill 188 would establish the Welcoming Alaska Office in the DOLWD, a statewide effort supporting "New Alaskans," including newcomers from the Lower 48 and international workers. New Alaskans start families, worship with neighbors, run businesses, and stay in Alaska. The Welcoming Alaska Office builds upon existing integration strategies towards New Alaskans. The Welcoming Alaska Office would replace the existing OCA, creating a 9-member governance committee to serve in an advisory capacity. The Office would support Alaska businesses in recruiting and retaining New Alaskans. HB 188 also includes a provision, subject to appropriation, allowing the creation of an Alaska Welcoming Center to serve as a comprehensive service center for newcomers from the lower 48, migrants, immigrants, and refugees. Finally, HB 188 would include conducting a study to determine immigration opportunities and track the office's performance outcomes.

New Alaskans are not a temporary workforce, but long-term contributors to Alaska's communities and economy. By improving coordination among state agencies, strengthening language access, and partnering with employers and community organizations, this bill seeks to close systemic gaps, reduce economic loss, and support successful integration.

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