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A. Radford  
4/3/26

**CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 188(STA)**

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

**BY THE HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**Offered:  
Referred:**

**Sponsor(s): REPRESENTATIVE MINA**

**A BILL**

**FOR AN ACT ENTITLED**

1 **"An Act establishing the welcoming Alaska office; establishing the welcoming Alaska**  
2 **center; establishing the Welcoming Alaska Advisory Committee; relating to the state's**  
3 **refugee services program; repealing the office of citizenship assistance; and providing**  
4 **for an effective date."**

5 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

6 \* **Section 1.** AS 23.05 is amended by adding new sections to read:

7 **Sec. 23.05.131. Welcoming Alaska office.** (a) The welcoming Alaska office is  
8 established in the department to promote full participation of new immigrants,  
9 refugees, and other newcomers as self-sufficient individuals and families in the  
10 economic, social, and civic life of the state, and to advance the state's workforce  
11 security. Under the supervision of the executive director, the office shall

12 (1) provide to new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers employment  
13 information, referrals to employment services, including job placement services, and  
14 information about how to access labor unions, administrative agencies, and court

1 actions to pursue claims or charges of job discrimination, illegal termination of  
2 employment, sexual harassment, and unsafe working conditions;

3 (2) serve as the state's coordinating entity among stakeholders,  
4 including state agencies and local governments, to align strategies to reduce licensing  
5 and other employment barriers for new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

6 (3) use the education and experience of new immigrants, refugees, and  
7 newcomers to benefit the economy of the state;

8 (4) contract with other state agencies to develop and administer  
9 programs or services that promote entrance into and mobility within the workforce for  
10 new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

11 (5) consult with stakeholders, including state agencies and local  
12 governments, to develop and implement a statewide strategy to support businesses in  
13 recruiting and retaining workers who are new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

14 (6) advise the commissioner on

15 (A) improving employment opportunities for new immigrants,  
16 refugees, and newcomers;

17 (B) preventing employment discrimination against new  
18 immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

19 (C) cooperating with state and federal agencies to accomplish  
20 the office's mission;

21 (D) supporting the economic and social integration of new  
22 immigrants, refugees, and newcomers; and

23 (E) reducing the exploitation of new immigrants, refugees, and  
24 newcomers;

25 (7) subject to appropriation, offer grants to support the economic and  
26 social integration of new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

27 (8) serve as a convener for community-based organizations serving  
28 new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

29 (9) design and implement strategies and programs to make the state a  
30 more welcoming place for new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

31 (10) serve as a point of contact for all state agencies regarding issues

1 affecting new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

2 (11) subject to appropriation, establish the welcoming Alaska center  
3 under AS 25.05.134 and operate a toll-free multilingual hotline for referral of services;

4 (12) coordinate with departments and nonprofit organizations to assist  
5 new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers in improving quality-of-life issues,  
6 including access to business opportunities, education, employment, housing, health  
7 care, and other services;

8 (13) subject to appropriation, assist political subdivisions with fees and  
9 other costs associated with visa applications, recruitment, and housing support for new  
10 immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

11 (14) research and analyze economic and demographic trends to better  
12 serve new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

13 (15) coordinate and establish best practices for language access  
14 initiatives for all state agencies;

15 (16) serve as an information clearinghouse on information regarding  
16 new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

17 (17) coordinate refugee programs, including education, training,  
18 employment, housing, and medical support and other services, for refugees who no  
19 longer receive federal assistance; and

20 (18) make policy recommendations to the governor and the legislature  
21 on issues affecting new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers.

22 (b) The office may contract with other organizations as appropriate to further  
23 the goals of the office.

24 (c) The commissioner shall appoint an individual to serve as the executive  
25 director of the office. The executive director is in the partially exempt service under  
26 AS 39.25 (State Personnel Act).

27 (d) The department shall adopt regulations necessary to implement this  
28 section.

29 **Sec. 23.05.132. Welcoming Alaska liaison.** (a) Each principal department in  
30 the executive branch shall designate one staff member to serve as a liaison between  
31 the department and the office.

1 (b) A liaison shall

2 (1) disseminate information about services offered by the department  
3 that are available to new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers, department staff, the  
4 office, and the public;

5 (2) communicate with the office on issues affecting new immigrants,  
6 refugees, and newcomers;

7 (3) when applicable, coordinate between the office, the liaison's  
8 department, and professional boards within the liaison's department to assist the office  
9 with license applications from new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers.

10 **Sec. 23.05.133. Welcoming Alaska Advisory Committee.** (a) The  
11 Welcoming Alaska Advisory Committee is established in the department and shall be  
12 staffed and administered by the office. The advisory committee consists of the  
13 following 13 members:

14 (1) one nonvoting member who is a member of the house of  
15 representatives appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives;

16 (2) one nonvoting member who is a member of the senate appointed by  
17 the president of the senate;

18 (3) 11 voting members appointed by the governor as follows:

19 (A) a representative from a nonprofit organization that provides  
20 employment or language services to new immigrants, refugees, and  
21 newcomers;

22 (B) a representative from a tribal nonprofit organization;

23 (C) a representative from the Alaska Council of School  
24 Administrators;

25 (D) a representative from the business community;

26 (E) a representative from a nonprofit legal services agency that  
27 provides services to immigrants and refugees;

28 (F) a representative of a refugee resettlement agency operating  
29 in the state;

30 (G) a representative of a refugee-led or immigrant-service  
31 community-based organization;

1 (H) a representative with expertise in workforce development  
2 or labor market analysis;

3 (I) a representative from the health care delivery sector;

4 (J) a representative from the criminal justice system;

5 (K) a member of the public.

6 (b) The committee shall

7 (1) assist the office with developing recommendations for policies,  
8 procedures, regulations, and legislation to help ensure state government and state  
9 programs are accessible and responsive to the needs of new immigrants, refugees, and  
10 newcomers;

11 (2) work with the office to monitor the work of state agencies to  
12 include and retain new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers in state programs;

13 (3) conduct public meetings, as requested by the governor or the  
14 office, for the public to comment and make suggestions on attracting to and retaining  
15 in the state new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers and improving the employment  
16 opportunities, inclusion in civic matters, and community connections of new  
17 immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

18 (4) conduct studies, on request of the governor or the office, on issues  
19 affecting new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

20 (5) advise the office on ways to increase outreach to new immigrants,  
21 refugees, and newcomers; and

22 (6) review budget requests of the office and recommend to the  
23 commissioner amounts for appropriations to the office.

24 (c) A voting member of the committee appointed by the governor serves at the  
25 pleasure of the governor for staggered terms of four years until reappointed or  
26 replaced. If a vacancy occurs among the voting members, the governor shall appoint a  
27 member for the unexpired portion of the term.

28 (d) Voting members of the committee shall elect a member to serve as chair.

29 (e) A majority of the committee constitutes a quorum.

30 (f) The committee shall meet at least twice a year. A meeting may be held at  
31 the call of the chair, by request of a majority of the committee, or at the request of the

1 executive director of the office.

2 (g) A member of the committee receives no salary but is entitled to per diem  
3 and travel expenses authorized for boards and commissions under AS 39.20.180.

4 **Sec. 23.05.134. Welcoming Alaska center.** (a) Subject to appropriation, the  
5 office shall establish a welcoming Alaska center in one or more communities to  
6 provide virtual and in-person information and assistance for new immigrants,  
7 refugees, and newcomers. The office shall prioritize establishing a welcoming Alaska  
8 center in an existing state office facility or on a University of Alaska campus that is  
9 easily accessible and conveniently located.

10 (b) A welcoming Alaska center shall provide the following services to new  
11 immigrants, refugees, and newcomers:

- 12 (1) English and Alaska Native language instruction;  
13 (2) employment services and training; and  
14 (3) assistance with access to government programs and community  
15 services.

16 **Sec. 23.05.135. Definitions.** In AS 23.05.131 - 23.05.135,

17 (1) "newcomer" means a person who moved to the state from another  
18 state in the preceding 36 months;

19 (2) "new immigrant" means a person, or the child of a person, who has  
20 arrived, or will arrive, to the state as an immigrant;

21 (3) "office" means the welcoming Alaska office established under  
22 AS 23.05.131;

23 (4) "refugee" has the meaning given in 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(42)  
24 (Immigration and Nationality Act) and includes individuals eligible for services under  
25 8 U.S.C. 1521 - 1524 (Refugee Act of 1980) or any successor federal program.

26 \* **Sec. 2.** AS 23.05.131(a), enacted by sec. 1 of this Act, is amended to read:

27 (a) The welcoming Alaska office is established in the department to promote  
28 full participation of new immigrants, refugees, and other newcomers as self-sufficient  
29 individuals and families in the economic, social, and civic life of the state, and to  
30 advance the state's workforce security. Under the supervision of the executive director,  
31 the office shall

1 (1) provide to new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers employment  
2 information, referrals to employment services, including job placement services, and  
3 information about how to access labor unions, administrative agencies, and court  
4 actions to pursue claims or charges of job discrimination, illegal termination of  
5 employment, sexual harassment, and unsafe working conditions;

6 (2) serve as the state's coordinating entity among stakeholders,  
7 including state agencies and local governments, to align strategies to reduce licensing  
8 and other employment barriers for new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

9 (3) use the education and experience of new immigrants, refugees, and  
10 newcomers to benefit the economy of the state;

11 (4) contract with other state agencies to develop and administer  
12 programs or services that promote entrance into and mobility within the workforce for  
13 new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

14 (5) consult with stakeholders, including state agencies and local  
15 governments, to develop and implement a statewide strategy to support businesses in  
16 recruiting and retaining workers who are new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

17 (6) advise the commissioner on

18 (A) improving employment opportunities for new immigrants,  
19 refugees, and newcomers;

20 (B) preventing employment discrimination against new  
21 immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

22 (C) cooperating with state and federal agencies to accomplish  
23 the office's mission;

24 (D) supporting the economic and social integration of new  
25 immigrants, refugees, and newcomers; and

26 (E) reducing the exploitation of new immigrants, refugees, and  
27 newcomers;

28 (7) subject to appropriation, offer grants to support the economic and  
29 social integration of new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

30 (8) serve as a convener for community-based organizations serving  
31 new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

1 (9) design and implement strategies and programs to make the state a  
2 more welcoming place for new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

3 (10) serve as a point of contact for all state agencies regarding issues  
4 affecting new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

5 (11) subject to appropriation, establish the welcoming Alaska center  
6 under AS 25.05.134 and operate a toll-free multilingual hotline for referral of services;

7 (12) coordinate with departments and nonprofit organizations to assist  
8 new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers in improving quality-of-life issues,  
9 including access to business opportunities, education, employment, housing, health  
10 care, and other services;

11 (13) subject to appropriation, assist political subdivisions with fees and  
12 other costs associated with visa applications, recruitment, and housing support for new  
13 immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

14 (14) research and analyze economic and demographic trends to better  
15 serve new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

16 (15) coordinate and establish best practices for language access  
17 initiatives for all state agencies;

18 (16) serve as an information clearinghouse on information regarding  
19 new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

20 (17) coordinate refugee programs, including education, training,  
21 employment, housing, and medical support and other services, for refugees who no  
22 longer receive federal assistance; [AND]

23 (18) make policy recommendations to the governor and the legislature  
24 on issues affecting new immigrants, refugees, and newcomers; **and**

25 **(19) serve as the entity responsible for administering the state's**  
26 **refugee services program under 8 U.S.C. 1521 - 1524 (Refugee Act of 1980) and**  
27 **assume responsibilities previously carried out by the state's designee, including**

28 **(A) providing or coordinating refugee resettlement,**  
29 **integration, and workforce participation services to support long-term**  
30 **economic self-sufficiency;**

31 **(B) operating or overseeing refugee support services,**

1 **including refugee cash and medical assistance as authorized; and**  
 2 **(C) collaborating with refugee resettlement agencies,**  
 3 **community partners, and refugee-led organizations.**

4 \* **Sec. 3.** AS 23.05.131(c), enacted by sec. 1 of this Act, is amended to read:

5 (c) The commissioner shall appoint an individual to serve as the executive  
 6 director of the office. The executive director is in the partially exempt service under  
 7 AS 39.25 (State Personnel Act). **The executive director shall serve as the state**  
 8 **refugee coordinator for the state's refugee services program under 8 U.S.C 1521 -**  
 9 **1524 (Refugee Act of 1980).**

10 \* **Sec. 4.** AS 23.05.131, enacted by sec. 1 of this Act, is amended by adding a new  
 11 subsection to read:

12 (e) The commissioner of health shall designate an employee in the Department  
 13 of Health to serve as the coordinator of refugee health services under the state's  
 14 refugee services program. The coordinator of refugee health services shall work with  
 15 public health agencies to coordinate the refugee health program in accordance with  
 16 requirements and guidance from the federal office responsible for refugee resettlement  
 17 programs.

18 \* **Sec. 5.** AS 39.25.120(c) is amended by adding a new paragraph to read:

19 (22) the executive director of the welcoming Alaska office.

20 \* **Sec. 6.** AS 23.05.125 is repealed.

21 \* **Sec. 7.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to  
 22 read:

23 STUDY; REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE. The welcoming Alaska office  
 24 established under AS 23.05.131 shall conduct a study to determine immigration opportunities  
 25 in the state, establish goals for the welcoming Alaska office, and develop performance  
 26 indicators to measure progress for the welcoming Alaska office. The study must include input  
 27 from employers in the state. The welcoming Alaska office shall prepare a report explaining  
 28 the findings from the study and submit the report by July 1, 2027, to the senate secretary and  
 29 the chief clerk of the house of representatives and notify the legislature that the report is  
 30 available.

31 \* **Sec. 8.** Sections 2 - 4 of this Act take effect July 1, 2027.

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\* **Sec. 9.** Except as provided in sec. 8 of this Act, this Act takes effect July 1, 2026.