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# Alaska Marine Highway System ‘going the wrong direction’ on staffing, director says

Iris Samuels : 7-8 minutes



The Alaska Marine Highway ferry Kennicott is docked in Sitka on February 24, 2024. (Marc Lester / ADN)

Alaska’s ferry service will not offer the popular cross-gulf sailings between Southeast Alaska and Southcentral Alaska for the fourth year running due to a staffing shortage, director Craig Tornga told state lawmakers.

Roughly 24% of the positions in the Alaska Marine Highway System are vacant, and the rate is highest among the positions that require most training. Among wheelhouse positions, the vacancy rate is above 30%.

To operate the cross-gulf route, popular among families moving to the state and independent travelers looking to explore Alaska without driving through Canada, the system requires enough staff to operate seven vessels. But it has only enough for six.

“Both the engine room and the wheelhouse are going the wrong direction right now, unfortunately. We’re not making as many as we need,” Tornga said in a House committee hearing on Tuesday.

In 2024, the system filled 31 positions but lost 45 workers for the same qualifications to retirement and resignations