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A. Radford
5/1/26

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 169(STA)

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY THE SENATE STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Offered:
Referred:

Sponsor(s): SENATOR TOBIN

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 immigrants, refugees,
9 and other newcomers as self-sufficient individuals and families in the economic,
10 social, and civic life of the state, and to advance the state's workforce security. Under
11 the supervision of the executive director, the office shall

12 (1) provide to 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 barriers that hinder immigrants, refugees, and newcomers from gaining
6 employment or starting a business;

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

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

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

16 (6) advise the commissioner on

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

31 (9) design and implement strategies and programs to make the state a

1 more welcoming place for immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

22 (18) make policy recommendations to the governor and the legislature
23 on issues affecting immigrants, refugees, and newcomers.

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

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

29 (d) The department shall adopt regulations necessary to implement this
30 section.

31 **Sec. 23.05.132. Welcoming Alaska liaison.** (a) Each principal department in

1 the executive branch shall designate one staff member to serve as a liaison between
2 the department and the office.

3 (b) A liaison shall

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

7 (2) communicate with the office on issues affecting immigrants,
8 refugees, and newcomers;

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

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

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

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

20 (3) 11 voting members appointed by the governor as follows:

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

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

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

26 (D) a representative from the business and economic
27 development community;

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

30 (F) a representative of a refugee resettlement agency operating
31 in the state;

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

3 (H) a representative with expertise in workforce development
4 or labor market analysis;

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

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

7 (K) a member of the public.

8 (b) The committee shall

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

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

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

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

22 (5) advise the office on ways to increase outreach to immigrants,
23 refugees, and newcomers; and

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

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

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

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

1 (f) The committee shall meet at least twice a year. A meeting may be held at
2 the call of the chair, by request of a majority of the committee, or at the request of the
3 executive director of the office.

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

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

12 (b) A welcoming Alaska center shall provide or coordinate the following
13 services for immigrants, refugees, and newcomers:

- 14 (1) language instruction;
15 (2) employment services and training; and
16 (3) assistance with access to government programs and community
17 services.

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

19 (1) "immigrant" has the meaning given in 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(15)
20 (Immigration and Nationality Act);

21 (2) "newcomer" means a person who moved to the state from another
22 state in the preceding 36 months;

23 (3) "office" means the welcoming Alaska office established under
24 AS 23.05.131;

25 (4) "refugee" has the meaning given in 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(42)
26 (Immigration and Nationality Act) and includes individuals eligible for services under
27 8 U.S.C. 1521 - 1524 (Refugee Act of 1980) or any successor federal program.

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

29 (a) The welcoming Alaska office is established in the department to promote
30 full participation of immigrants, refugees, and other newcomers as self-sufficient
31 individuals and families in the economic, social, and civic life of the state, and to

1 advance the state's workforce security. Under the supervision of the executive director,
2 the office shall

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

8 (2) serve as the state's coordinating entity among stakeholders,
9 including state agencies and local governments, to align strategies to reduce licensing
10 and other barriers that hinder immigrants, refugees, and newcomers from gaining
11 employment or starting a business;

12 (3) use the education and experience of immigrants, refugees, and
13 newcomers to benefit the economy of the state;

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

17 (5) consult with stakeholders, including state agencies and local
18 governments, to develop and implement a statewide strategy to support businesses in
19 recruiting and retaining workers who are immigrants, refugees, and newcomers and to
20 support immigrants, refugees, and newcomers in starting and scaling new businesses;

21 (6) advise the commissioner on

22 (A) improving employment opportunities for immigrants,
23 refugees, and newcomers;

24 (B) preventing employment discrimination against immigrants,
25 refugees, and newcomers;

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

28 (D) supporting the economic and social integration of
29 immigrants, refugees, and newcomers; and

30 (E) reducing the exploitation of immigrants, refugees, and
31 newcomers;

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

3 (8) serve as a convener for community-based organizations serving
4 immigrants, refugees, and newcomers;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

27 (18) make policy recommendations to the governor and the legislature
28 on issues affecting immigrants, refugees, and newcomers; and

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

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

4 **(B) operating or overseeing refugee support services,**
 5 **including refugee cash and medical assistance as authorized; and**

6 **(C) collaborating with refugee resettlement agencies,**
 7 **community partners, and refugee-led organizations.**

8 * **Sec. 3.** AS 23.05.131, enacted by sec. 1 of this Act, is amended by adding new subsections
 9 to read:

10 (e) The office shall employ an individual to serve as the state refugee
 11 coordinator for the state's refugee services program under 8 U.S.C. 1521 - 1524
 12 (Refugee Act of 1980).

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

19 * **Sec. 4.** AS 39.25.120(c) is amended by adding a new paragraph to read:

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

21 * **Sec. 5.** AS 23.05.125 is repealed.

22 * **Sec. 6.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to
 23 read:

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

1 * **Sec. 7.** Sections 2 and 3 of this Act take effect July 1, 2027.

2 * **Sec. 8.** Except as provided in sec. 7 of this Act, this Act takes effect July 1, 2026.