



March 22, 2026

Chair Kelly Merrick  
Senate Community and Regional Affairs Committee  
Alaska State Legislature, State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801

***RE: Support for Senate Bill 268 – Seafood Processing Workforce Stability***

Dear Chair Merrick and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Pacific Seafood Processors Association (PSPA), I am writing to express our support for Senate Bill 268, relating to minimum paid sick leave requirements for individuals employed in seafood processing. PSPA is a trade association which represents seafood processors with 50 facilities in 22 coastal communities across Alaska, from Ketchikan to Cordova to Kodiak to Unalaska to Bristol Bay. PSPA companies buy fish from thousands of independent commercial fishermen across the state and in almost every fishery.

The health of the seafood industry is critical to Alaska, as it generates \$6 billion in economic activity in Alaska annually, creates 42,000 direct jobs (approximately 50% of which are fishermen and 50% processing workers), is the state’s largest manufacturing and export sector, and lowers costs of transportation for all Alaskans.

Alaska’s seafood processing sector operates under uniquely challenging conditions. Processing facilities are often located in highly remote environments, where workforce availability, housing, transportation, operational continuity, and servicing of commercial fishermen are tightly interconnected. These realities require policies that are carefully tailored to the industry’s structure, while still supporting the health and well-being of employees.

House Bill 375 reflects a thoughtful and balanced approach. It recognizes the intent of the voter-approved paid sick leave initiative while also addressing the distinct nature of seafood processing operations and connection to commercial fishermen. In the original language of the ballot measure, an exemption was made to the mandatory paid sick leave section for fishermen, agricultural and aquaculture workers, and shrimp “hand-pickers”.

By aligning seafood processors more closely with the exemptions already provided by law, this legislation recognizes the interconnected nature of fishermen and processors in the Alaska seafood industry, ensures commercial fishermen will continue to get uninterrupted services, and provides greater consistency of application across similarly situated industries.

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This legislation is necessary, not only to align seafood processors with the original exemption provided in law to fishermen, but also to fix an unintended consequence of the ballot measure that is highly problematic for seafood processors. Certain mandatory requirements of the ballot measure combine to create a strong financial incentive for workers to misuse the mandatory paid sick leave at the end of a season. In particular, the following three mandatory provisions combine to create this strong incentive:

- 1) Accrual of sick leave, up to 56 hours
- 2) Use-it, or lose-it provision
- 3) No practical way for employers to ensure employees are sick

For seasonal seafood processing workers, who are interested in intensive work periods and long hours with significant overtime wages, these three mandatory provisions create a strong financial incentive for workers to utilize the paid sick leave benefit during the final 1-2 weeks of the season, before they lose it. If a sufficient workforce is not in place during the season, processors cannot fully operate and continue to serve fishermen.

Prior to the ballot measure, full-time seafood processing workers already received paid sick leave as one of many benefits, including health insurance, provided by seafood processing companies, which help the seafood industry compete for a dedicated and quality workforce in rural communities. Seasonal employees are provided different benefits, including transportation, meals, and housing. There are already existing practices and incentives to prevent employees from working while sick, particularly for food safety.

In conclusion, SB 268 supports workforce stability and operational planning in an industry that already includes high risk and unpredictability of wild fisheries. Predictable and workable leave policies help employers maintain safe, efficient operations while continuing to provide thousands of jobs, and purchase fish in an efficient manner from thousands of commercial fishermen, maintaining high quality and value, and keeping fishermen fishing.

We appreciate the Legislature's recognition of the unique operational realities of the Alaska seafood sector and respectfully urge your support for SB 268.

Sincerely,

  
Julie Decker, President  
Pacific Seafood Processors Association