

Dear Alaskans,

3/26/18

In response to the SB303, and as one who works a good 50-60 hours a week as a Rehabilitation Specialist, I have questions about many points in this bill. Alaska has been my home for many years and I have been lucky to have travelled quite a bit throughout this state. During this time, I have spent almost 20 years in working to serve folks who experience disabilities, to include special education, over 13 years of working in vocational rehabilitation to assist folks who experience barriers to employment, and 9 years as a public benefits specialist who has helped beneficiaries learn how to manage their benefits while they explore how they might be able to reenter into the work force. But actually, I am fairly new to working with the Workers' Compensation Reemployment Benefits Division as a Rehab Specialist. I only just started learning my current expertise, 10 years ago. Who knew, that while working with injured workers, I would be hearing their stories, their heartaches of possibly losing their livelihood, that I would be witnessing their fears of losing everything, while I thought all I was to do was write their evaluations and vocational plans.

The first and most grave concern I have with this SB303, is that it is apparent that whomever took part in creating this bill, "forgot" to ask the insiders what may be going on, that is what else does there need to be addressed? I propose that any of us who work in the field can and should offer wisdom to this discussion. What I question is, just how does this SB303, as written, improve the rights and protection of injured workers during a rather vulnerable period of time when they cannot earn a living due to their work-related injury? I have never met an injured worker who reported that he or she was glad to be injured, unable to work, and fears not being able to pay bills. Have you?

We mostly share a common ground of why it is we are here in this great state. But we also all understand that the stunning beauty we have here comes with a higher cost of living, extreme weather conditions, and therefore a larger number of dangerous industries. In fact, I would imagine that statistically we just might have a higher increase of injured workers here, compared to other states. But we don't care how they do it in the lower 48, because we take care of our own! We have a unique system that may struggle to balance the playing field by putting protections in place for our injured workers, but what we do **not** want to do is jeopardize that protection.

There are a few good points raised in the SB303. In my humble opinion, included are too many points that show poor judgment from a point of view that has no real insider's understanding of what is working and what is not. In other words, unless the authors include those of us that have been working in the front lines, as a neutral party, who coordinates with all parties within the process, then the efforts to put a fair and just system into place, for the injured workers, will be lost.

Yes, we have a convoluted system. We all agree that there should be some improvement in our current system. However, it is truly far too premature to consider moving forward with SB303. This bill can cause a greater burden on all of us if it is not re-worked. Please do not continue on with this bill until there is more discussion, clarity and wisdom, as to what

didn't work in the past and still won't, and what else might be considered to reach the ultimate goal of taking care of our own.

Thank you kindly for really listening to my voice.
Most respectfully,

Josetta Cranston, M.Ed., CDMS, CWIC, CES