



**LABORERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION
of NORTH AMERICA
LOCAL 942**

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BRYAN IMUS
President

April 4, 2018



SCOTT EICKHOLT
Business Manager
Secretary-Treasurer

Senator Mia Costello
Senate Labor & Commerce Committee Chair
State Capitol, Room 504
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: HB 142 Unemployment Insurance Benefits

Dear Chair Costello,

The Laborers Local 942 represents over 1000 highly qualified members who work in the Northern Region to build Alaska. During times of training and in between seasons, our members depend on the unemployment insurance benefits to help them manage their household finances. On behalf of these members, please schedule a hearing for HB 142 this session to increase the maximum weekly benefit amount from \$370 to \$510 per week.

Our apprentice program accepts qualified applicants for a non-paid intensive training program before they can be dispatched for on-the job calls to earn a wage. In order to qualify, our applicants are screened above the industry standard, which requires a high school diploma or GED, fitness test, 5,100 hours of apprentice on-the-job work, and hair follicle drug test. Many of our apprentices are young and often struggle financially while training in the program, and they depend on the Department of Labor's Unemployment Insurance to help them through this time of intense instruction with no pay.

In July 2017, Alaska Economic Trends published data showing Alaska ranked as the third most expensive state for cost of living expenses. Yet Alaska is 37th compared to the rest of the United States in MWBA. For members who are working and using the program as it was intended – between jobs and seasons – this benefit is critical to their career in Alaska. Increasing the MWBA to 50% of the average weekly wage creates parity with other states who use this threshold as a reasonable benefit for unemployed individuals.

Please schedule a hearing for this important bill so hard working Alaskans are supported in times of bust, as well as boom. The reduced state budget has adversely affected our membership, though HB 142 has no effect on the budget, and is sustainably supported. Alaska is one of only three states that require both employee and employer to contribute to this benefit. For the workers who build Alaska, their families and our statewide communities, please schedule HB 142 for a hearing as soon as possible.

Respectfully yours,

Mindy O'Neill
Organizer, Laborers Local 942

Cc: Senator Kevin Meyer, Senator Gary Stevens, Senator Berta Gardner, Senator Peter Micciche