

**Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.**

For the Record, I am Dr Brett Watson, an economist at the University of Alaska Anchorage's Institute of Social and Economic Research—ISER.

I'm testifying in support of SB 181, which would streamline data access for researchers working on Alaska-specific policy issues.

**As you know, Alaska's communities are unique—geographically, economically, and socially.**

But the data we rely on to understand these communities is often either too broad or not timely enough. Federal sources like the US Census or the Bureau of Labor Statistics struggle to give us reliable information in our rural communities because their sample sizes are just too small or their coverage too broad.

The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, on the other hand, maintains data that is more specific, more accurate, and more timely. Researchers at ISER have used this data in the past—but the process is cumbersome. We have to send staff to Juneau, negotiate custom agreements, and go through multiple layers of legal and procurement approvals. This takes time, money, and effort on both sides—and it slows down our ability to respond to the needs of the state.

**SB 181 would fix that.**

It allows the University and the Department of Labor to collaborate more efficiently, removing hurdles while still protecting data confidentiality. ISER has a long track record of handling sensitive data securely. All our researchers follow rigorous Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols. With improved access, we could more rapidly conduct research that supports better decision-making.

I've included as part of my written submission a memo more fully outlining how research collaboration might work, and an example of how we leveraged a past collaboration to understand the economic multiplier effects of fishing in Alaska's coastal communities – I hope these will provide further evidence for the value of action on this legislation.

**SB 181 gives us a smart, cost-effective way to unlock the value of existing data, improve research quality, and support good policymaking.**

I urge you to support the bill, and I thank you for your time.