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April 15, 2025

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for Senate Bill 159 - Increase to the STEP Diversion Rate

Dear Senator Bjorkman and Members of the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee,

We are writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 159, which proposes increasing the diversion from employee unemployment insurance contributions to the State Training and Employment Program (STEP) from 0.10% to 0.20% of taxable wages. This investment is both timely and essential to meeting Alaska's growing workforce development needs.

As a workforce training provider Kenai Peninsula Driving Instruction LLC has relied on STEP funding to train new commercial drivers for the trucking industry that is in desperate need of qualified new drivers. The impact of this program on our participants and the broader community has been substantial. The STEP program has trained over 24 new CDL drivers through our company in the past year.

However, the need is great, and the Alaska Workforce Investment Board regularly receives far more STEP funding requests than are available for grants. At the same time, the cost of delivering high-quality training continues to rise, making each dollar more stretched than in years past. The current diversion is simply not enough to meet statewide workforce demand.

Our organization has seen firsthand how STEP supports employment in sectors with high non-resident hire rates and helps reduce future unemployment claims. By giving more Alaskans, the opportunity to gain skills and secure steady employment, we are building a stronger, more self-reliant workforce across the state.

We thank Chair Bjorkman and Senate Labor and Commerce for sponsoring Senate Bill 159, and respectfully urge your support of its passage. It is a practical, high-returning investment in Alaska's workforce and economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alexander Douthit". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alexander" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Douthit".

Alexander Douthit
Owner
Kenai Peninsula Driving Instruction LLC



Mayor
Suzanne LaFrance

Anchorage Fire Department



Fire Chief
Douglas Schrage

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for Senate Bill 159 - Increase to the STEP Diversion Rate Dear Senator Bjorkman and Members of the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee,

We are writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 159, which proposes increasing the allocation to the State Training and Employment Program (STEP).

Our Training Center serves as a vital regional facility, delivering specialized training to participants both within and beyond the Municipality. In recent years, however, a steady increase in emergency responses and an increasing need for training has outpaced available funding, placing critical development opportunities for our personnel at risk. These opportunities are necessary for maintaining proficiency in both administrative and operational functions vital to public safety.

Since receiving our first STEP grant in June 2024, we have seen firsthand the transformative impact of the program. Unlike many of our Lower 48 counterparts, Alaska faces unique challenges in accessing local experts to provide the highly specialized skills our workforce requires—especially in the public safety sector. STEP funding has helped us bridge that gap.

With STEP support, we hosted Ford vehicle maintenance training, benefiting not only AFD mechanics but also those from other Municipal departments and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. This training certified our mechanics to efficiently repair fleet vehicles without relying on external dealerships, reducing service downtime while enhancing the mechanics' career development.

STEP funding also enabled data analysts, and AFD and APD dispatchers to attend leading industry symposiums, equipping them with knowledge of emerging technologies and best practices that would otherwise have been out of reach. Additionally, it provided our leadership teams the opportunity to attend management programs in the Lower 48, where they gained actionable insights from peer departments addressing similar operational challenges.



Mayor
Suzanne LaFrance

Anchorage Fire Department



Fire Chief
Douglas Schrage

Put simply, STEP funding has elevated our members' effectiveness in their current roles, improved their prospects for advancement, and connected our leadership with real-time solutions from across the nation.

Senate Bill 159 is more than a funding increase—it is an investment in Alaskans who are eager to grow, serve, and contribute to a stronger, more resilient future. We extend our sincere appreciation to Chair Bjorkman and the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee for sponsoring this critical legislation, and we respectfully urge your full support of its passage.

Sincerely,

Douglas Schrage



Alaska Operating Engineers/Employers Training Trust
Apprenticeship and Training
PO Box 0989, Palmer, AK 99645
Phone: 907-746-3117 Fax: 907-745-6136

April 15, 2025

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for Senate Bill 159 – Increase to the STEP Diversion Rate

Dear Senator Bjorkman and Members of the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee,

We are writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 159, which proposes increasing the diversion from employee unemployment insurance contributions to the State Training and Employment Program (STEP) from 0.10% to 0.20% of taxable wages. This investment is both timely and essential to meeting Alaska's growing workforce development needs.

As a workforce training provider, Alaska Operating Engineers Employer's Training Trust Fund, has relied on STEP funding to enable us to train Alaskan residents statewide in the latest standards of the construction industry and keep them employed in the state. The impact of this program on our participants and the broader community has been substantial.

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board regularly receives far more STEP funding requests than are available for grants. At the same time, the cost of delivering high-quality training continues to rise, making each dollar more stretched than in years past. The current diversion is simply not enough to meet statewide workforce demand.

Our organization has seen firsthand how STEP supports employment in sectors with high non-resident hire rates and helps reduce future unemployment claims. By giving more Alaskans the opportunity to gain skills and secure steady employment, we are building a stronger, more self-reliant workforce across the state.

We thank Chair Bjorkman and Senate Labor and Commerce for sponsoring Senate Bill 159, and respectfully urge your support of its passage. It is a practical, high-return investment in Alaska's workforce and economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kyle Virgin', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Kyle Virgin
Administrator
Alaska Operating Engineers Employer's Training Trust Fund



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ANCHORAGE, AK 99501
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April 15, 2025

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

Senator Kelly Merrick, Vice-Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
State Capitol Room 504
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for Senate Bill 159 – Increase to the STEP Diversion Rate

Bristol Bay Native Corporation (BBNC) supports Senate Bill 159 which would boost funding for the State Training and Employment Program (STEP) by increasing the diversion from employee unemployment insurance contributions from 0.10% to 0.20% of taxable wages. This increased investment is both timely and essential to addressing Alaska's growing workforce development needs.

As an Alaska-based employer, BBNC relies on STEP funding to expand training and employment opportunities for its shareholders. These funds enable BBNC to offer internships, train unemployed residents in high-demand fields such as transportation, construction, and oil and gas, and connect job seekers with meaningful employment opportunities. The impact of this program has been substantial, both for our shareholders and collectively for Bristol Bay's communities.

In the Bristol Bay region, unemployment rates continue to range upwards of 12%. Reliable access to a skilled, local workforce is critical to our ability to operate and grow, both within the region and throughout the state. STEP is a proven, effective tool that helps prepare Alaskans for employment, while also reducing turnover and recruitment costs for employers like us. We have seen firsthand how STEP-trained individuals come to work equipped with the skills we need, ready to contribute from day one.

Unfortunately, current STEP funding does not meet the demand. As training costs rise, the gap between the need and available resources is widening. Increasing STEP funding will offer Alaskans greater opportunities to develop job-ready skills and secure stable employment—ultimately strengthening the state's workforce and economy.

We thank the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee for sponsoring Senate Bill 159, and we respectfully urge support for its passage. This bill represents a practical, high-impact investment in Alaska's future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason Metrokin", written in a cursive style.

Jason Metrokin
President & CEO

cc: Senator Lyman Hoffman

WWW.BBNC.NET



April 15, 2025

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for Senate Bill 159 – Increase to the STEP Diversion Rate

Dear Senator Bjorkman and Members of the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee,

We are writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 159, which proposes increasing the diversion from employee unemployment insurance contributions to the State Training and Employment Program (STEP) from 0.10% to 0.20% of taxable wages. This investment is both timely and essential to meeting Alaska's growing workforce development needs.

F&E Aircraft Maintenance, dba FEAM Aero, is a third-party aircraft line maintenance company with 90 employees with well-paid jobs based in Anchorage.

As a beneficiary of the 2025 STEP program, we see firsthand how STEP supports employment in sectors with high nonresident hire rates and helps reduce future unemployment claims. By providing more Alaskans the opportunity to gain skills and secure steady employment, we are building a stronger, more self-reliant workforce across the state.

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board regularly receives far more STEP funding requests than are available for grants. At the same time, the cost of delivering high-quality training continues to rise, making each dollar more stretched than in years past. The current diversion is simply not enough to meet statewide workforce demand.

We thank Chair Bjorkman and Senate Labor and Commerce for sponsoring Senate Bill 159 and respectfully urge your support of its passage. It is a practical, high-return investment in Alaska's workforce and economy.

Sincerely,

Daniel Allawat

Dan Allawat
Chief Strategy Officer



FEAM AERO HEADQUARTERS

657 South Drive, Suite 306, Miami, FL 33166 | +1.305.871.3758

FEAM.AERO



**Plumbers & Steamfitters U.A. Local Union 262
Apprenticeship and Journeymen Training
Trust Fund**

1751 Anka Street
Juneau, Alaska 99801
Phone (907) 586-2874 FAX (907) 463-5116
E-mail: kkoruna@uanet.org



4/15/2025

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Bjorkman and Members of the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee,

We are writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 159, which proposes increasing the diversion from employee unemployment insurance contributions to the State Training and Employment Program (STEP) from 0.10% to 0.20% of taxable wages. This investment is both timely and essential to meeting Alaska's growing workforce development needs.

As a workforce training provider, the Plumbers & Steamfitters United Association Local 262 Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee has relied on STEP funding to assist in providing training for our apprenticeship program, which trains Alaskans in high-demand fields. Our program also and connects job seekers to employment, and creates a path to solid middle-class life and a dignified career with healthcare and pension benefits. The impact of this program on our participants and the broader community has been substantial.

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board regularly receives more STEP funding requests than are available for grants. At the same time, the cost of delivering high-quality training continues to rise, making each dollar more stretched than in years past. The current diversion is simply not enough to meet the statewide workforce demand.

Our organization has seen firsthand how STEP supports employment in sectors with high non-resident hire rates and helps reduce future unemployment claims. By giving more Alaskans the opportunity to gain skills and secure steady employment, we are building a stronger, more self-reliant workforce across the state.

We thank Chair Bjorkman and Senate Labor and Commerce for sponsoring Senate Bill 159, and respectfully urge your support of its passage. It is a practical, high-return investment in Alaska's workforce and economy.

Enclosed are success stories from our apprentices demonstrating the impact that the STEP program has on participants.

Sincerely,

Keith Koruna
Training Coordinator
Plumbers & Steamfitters
UA Local 262 JATC

Encumbrance No: PO3: Project Name: State Training & Employment Program - FY2025
250000414

By submission of this report, the preparer is certifying tht the report is current, true and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the grant agreement.

Submitted By: Darylann Cryts

1. **SUCCESS STORIES**

Please describe a specific success story of a participant from your program. Include details about the participant's background, the challenges they faced, the support they received through the program, and the positive changes or outcomes that resulted from their participation. Your narrative should highlight the impact of the program on their life and any measurable achievements.

Martin Stepetin Sr is one of the 2nd year apprentices in our program. He is from St.Paul island up north in Alaska, but he currently has a large family that resides in Juneau. Martin is older than a typical apprentice, and he realized later in life the benefits of joining a trade. Martin currently works for a contractor in Sitka, so he spends a lot of time away from his family. While that has been difficult for him, it has been a sacrifice he has made to better provide for his family. The apprenticeship program has allowed Martin to pursue his career goals, while still being able to support his family and learn skills that he can use for the rest of his life.

Attach any training photos, if applicable. Be sure to include a caption describing the training activity and the names of the participants in the photo.

Is there a photo release on ☒Yes ☐No
file for each person in the
picture?

Attach photo(s) and photo release forms, stories, articles, fliers, or other information you would like to share about your program.

(No File Attached)

Do you have another participant success story to share? Is so, please include the information here.

n/a

Is there a photo release on ☒Yes ☐No
file for each person in the
picture?

Attach photo(s) and photo release forms, stories, articles, fliers, or other information you would like to share about your program.

(No File Attached)

Can you describe a success story that highlights a significant milestone or achievement of your program? Explain the efforts involved in reaching this milestone and its impact on your program or participants.

n/a

Encumbrance No: PO3: Project Name: State Training & Employment Program - FY2025
250000414

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Submitted By: Darylann Cryts

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I asked participant Martin Brown to share his experience with the program. Below is his story, written from his perspective.

"I attended avtec and although I feel as though I know enough, this class humbles me and keeps my mind motivated and engaged to my career. Some things may seem simple but a reminder about how important each step, pipe size, and math problem are, is a way to have good looking and efficient work that provides people with water, drainage, and heat, and that makes these classes so important to me. Three-week snippets every six months also make it much more manageable money wise and don't bum me out. I'd say these classes keep me humble and motivated to execute my job that much better."

Attach any training photos, if applicable. Be sure to include a caption describing the training activity and the names of the participants in the photo.

Is there a photo release on ☐Yes ☒No
file for each person in the
picture?

Attach photo(s) and photo release forms, stories, articles, fliers, or other information you would like to share about your program.

(No File Attached)

Do you have another participant success story to share? Is so, please include the information here.

N/A

Is there a photo release on ☐Yes ☒No
file for each person in the
picture?

Attach photo(s) and photo release forms, stories, articles, fliers, or other information you would like to share about your program.

(No File Attached)

Can you describe a success story that highlights a significant milestone or achievement of your program? Explain the efforts involved in reaching this milestone and its impact on your program or participants.

The participants get letters of congratulations for each percentage that they move up in the program, in addition to receiving raises for each percentage. It is all on them how much they work and how on top of deadlines they are to achieve this.

Encumbrance No: PO3: Project Name: State Training & Employment Program - FY2025
250000414

By submission of this report, the preparer is certifying tht the report is current, true and in accordance with the terms and conditions of the grant agreement.

Submitted By: Darylann Cryts

1. **SUCCESS STORIES**

Please describe a specific success story of a participant from your program. Include details about the participant's background, the challenges they faced, the support they received through the program, and the positive changes or outcomes that resulted from their participation. Your narrative should highlight the impact of the program on their life and any measurable achievements.

Alexander Zellhuber is a 4th year apprentice in our program, and he has explained his experience in his own words: "Being part of the UA apprenticeship has changed my life. It has provided me with a wage I can comfortably raise my family on while going through the program and getting the training and experience to have a lifelong carrier as a journeyman. I have been able to learn and become proficient in both building and servicing plumbing, heating, and various other piping systems in residential and commercial applications."

Attach any training photos, if applicable. Be sure to include a caption describing the training activity and the names of the participants in the photo.

Is there a photo release on ☒Yes ☐No
file for each person in the
picture?

Attach photo(s) and photo release forms, stories, articles, fliers, or other information you would like to share about your program.

(No File Attached)

Do you have another participant success story to share? Is so, please include the information here.

N/A

Is there a photo release on ☒Yes ☐No
file for each person in the
picture?

Attach photo(s) and photo release forms, stories, articles, fliers, or other information you would like to share about your program.

(No File Attached)

Can you describe a success story that highlights a significant milestone or achievement of your program? Explain the efforts involved in reaching this milestone and its impact on your program or participants.

N/A



Alaska Forum
PO Box 212409
Anchorage, AK 99521-2409
Main Line: (907) 331-0271

April 14, 2025

The Alaska Forum is a statewide nonprofit organization committed to strengthening Alaska's workforce and communities. Through our robust training programs, we serve thousands of Alaskans each year—ranging from incumbent workers to job seekers—equipping them with skills in areas such as worker health and safety, hazardous materials handling, emergency response, energy efficiency, infrastructure resilience, and more.

A key component of our ability to offer these services is the support we receive through the State Training and Employment Program (STEP). STEP funding allows us to provide accessible, high-quality training to both employees and employers across the state, with particular emphasis on reaching Alaskans most in need of employment.

With STEP support, we have been able to:

- Deliver OSHA, HAZWOPER, and other critical safety training to remote regions of Alaska;
- Offer workforce development courses that support Alaska Native hire and veteran employment pathways;
- Collaborate with employers and agencies to upskill existing employees for high-demand positions; and
- Build training pipelines for environmental, construction, and infrastructure-related jobs critical to Alaska's long-term resilience.

The need for these services continues to grow. Each year, we see increased demand from employers seeking skilled workers and from individuals looking for the training necessary to enter or advance in the workforce. In recent years, limited funding has prevented us from meeting this full demand, forcing us to turn away qualified and motivated participants.

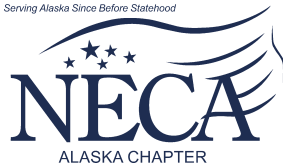
An increase in STEP funding would directly translate into expanded training capacity—allowing us to serve more employers, reach additional communities, and support more Alaskans in developing the skills they need for meaningful, long-term employment.

We appreciate the role STEP plays in Alaska's workforce development landscape and look forward to continuing our work in partnership with this vital program.

Sincerely,

Kurt A. Eilo, Executive Director
Alaska Forum

ALASKA JOINT ELECTRICAL APPRENTICESHIP AND TRAINING TRUST



MELISSA CARESS
Statewide Training Director
Tom Cashen Training Center
5800 B Street
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CASEY PTACEK
Training Coordinator
Kornfeind Training Center
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April 16th, 2025

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for Senate Bill 159 – Increase to the STEP Diversion Rate

Dear Senator Bjorkman and Members of the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee,

We are writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 159, which proposes increasing the diversion from employee unemployment insurance contributions to the State Training and Employment Program (STEP) from 0.10% to 0.20% of taxable wages. This investment is both timely and essential to meeting Alaska's growing workforce development needs.

As a federally registered apprenticeship program, the NECA/IBEW Apprenticeship School has relied on STEP funding to not only help ease the financial burden put on apprentices traveling to classroom training from outside the Anchorage and Fairbanks areas with housing and travel allowances, but also to remove the cost burden of attaining industry certifications such as CDL-A licensing, safety certifications and hands-on lab certifications; all contributing to keeping the Alaskan workforce strong and capable of performing the projects crucial to our state. The impact of this program on our participants and the broader community has been substantial.

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board regularly receives far more STEP funding requests than are available for grants. At the same time, the cost of delivering high-quality training continues to rise, making each dollar more stretched than in years past. The current diversion is simply not enough to meet statewide workforce demand.

Our organization has seen firsthand how STEP supports employment in sectors with high nonresident hire rates and helps reduce future unemployment claims. By giving more Alaskans the opportunity to gain skills and secure steady employment, we are building a stronger, more self-reliant workforce across the state.

We thank Chair Bjorkman and Senate Labor and Commerce for sponsoring Senate Bill 159, and respectfully urge your support of its passage. It is a practical, high-return investment in Alaska's workforce and economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Caress', with a stylized, flowing script.

Melissa Caress
Statewide Training Director
Alaska Joint Electrical Apprenticeship & Training Trust



Alaska Apprenticeship & Training Coordinators Association

8141 School Street
Anchorage, AK 99518
907-522-8230

www.aatca.org

"Unions Training Alaskans"

President

Jon Woodard

Training & Grants Director
(907) 522-8230

Vice Presidents

Anchorage:

Alexis Cowell

Executive Director
(907) 569-4711

Fairbanks:

Josh Bolton

Training Coordinator
(907) 452-4626

Secretary / Treasurer

Vacant

Representing

Alaska Works Partnership,
Inc.

Asbestos / Insulators

Boilermakers

Carpenters

Electricians

Ironworkers

Laborers

Painters / Allied Trades

Piledrivers & Divers

Plasters / Cement Masons

Plumbers & Pipefitters

Sheet Metal Workers

Teamsters

April 15, 2025

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair

Senate Labor and Commerce Committee

Alaska State Legislature

State Capitol Room 427

Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for Senate Bill 159 – Increase to the STEP Diversion Rate

Dear Senator Bjorkman and Members of the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee,
The Alaska Apprenticeship & Training Coordinators Association (AATCA) is writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 159, which proposes increasing the diversion from employee unemployment insurance contributions to the State Training and Employment Program (STEP) from 0.10% to 0.20% of taxable wages. This increase represents a crucial and timely investment in addressing Alaska's growing workforce development needs.

Reliable access to a trained workforce of Alaska residents is essential to the AATCA and its members' ability to operate and grow within Alaska's construction sector. STEP is a proven and invaluable tool that prepares Alaskans for meaningful careers and helps employers like us reduce turnover and recruitment costs. We have seen firsthand how STEP-trained individuals arrive with the essential skills needed, ready to contribute from day one.

Unfortunately, the current STEP funding is less adequate to meet the increasing demand. Increasing the diversion would help close this gap, ensuring that more Alaskans can access the training that leads to long-term, stable employment within the construction industry and other vital sectors. This investment will provide a pathway to stable, rewarding employment of an Alaska-based workforce.

Members of the AATCA and affiliated contractors have relied on STEP funding to support and expand apprenticeships, training Alaskans in high-demand fields, and connecting job seekers to employment. STEP funding is vital for providing accessibility to training for rural Alaskans. The impact of this program on our participants and the broader community has been substantial.

We thank Chair Bjorkman and the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee for sponsoring Senate Bill 159 and respectfully urge your support for its passage. This bill is a practical and high-return investment in Alaska's workforce and economy.

Sincerely,

Jon Woodard

President

Alaska Apprenticeship & Training Coordinator's Association (AATCA)



April 16, 2025

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for Senate Bill 159 – Increase to the STEP Diversion Rate

Dear Senator Bjorkman and Members of the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee,

On behalf of Alaska Works Partnership (AWP), I write in strong support of Senate Bill 159, which proposes increasing the diversion to the State Training and Employment Program (STEP) from 0.10% to 0.20% of taxable wages.

As a statewide workforce training provider, AWP serves hundreds of Alaskans annually across high-demand industries including construction, maintenance, mining, oil and gas, and transportation. The STEP program has been critical in helping us deliver meaningful, job-ready training to Alaskans who are eager to work. Key facts and needs include:

- AWP receives over 3,000 applications for training opportunities annually, yet current funding levels allow us to train less than a third.
- STEP supports vital cross-industry workforce development programs, such as:
 - Alaska's Women in the Trades - since 2003, this program has helped women enter and succeed in non-traditional sectors like construction, maintenance, and oilfield work.
 - Alaska's Helmets to Hardhats connects veterans and transitioning service members with career pathways across skilled trades and infrastructure sectors, helping retain their talent within Alaska.
- In FY2024, both programs experienced significant cuts due to stagnant STEP funding, despite a rise in training costs and participant demand.
- Alaska is grappling with a shrinking working-age population and persistent nonresident hire rates in key occupations.

- STEP addresses this by building a local, qualified workforce across sectors critical to the state's economy.
- It helps retain transitioning military members and their families, reducing outmigration and bringing long-term stability to local communities.
- Without additional funding, we are forced to turn away Alaskans who are ready to train and work - a missed opportunity for both the individual and the state.

Senate Bill 159 is a practical, high-impact solution. It will allow Alaska to strengthen its own workforce in industries that are foundational to our economy and essential to our self-reliance.

Thank you for your leadership, and we respectfully urge your support for the passage of SB 159.



Sincerely,
Alexis Cowell
Executive Director
Alaska Works Partnership, Inc.

alexisc@alaskaworks.org

CC:

Senator Kelly Merrick – sen.kelly.merrick@alaska.gov
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson – sen.elvi.gray-jackson@alaska.gov
Senator Forrest Dunbar – sen.forrest.dunbar@alaska.gov
Senator Robert Yundt – sen.robert.yundt@alaska.gov



April 14, 2025

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Bjorkman and Members of the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee,

We are writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 159, which proposes increasing the diversion from employee unemployment insurance contributions to the State Training and Employment Program (STEP) from 0.10% to 0.20% of taxable wages. This investment is both timely and essential to addressing Alaska's growing workforce development needs.

As a local apprenticeship training program, we have relied on STEP funding to expand our training opportunities and ensure that all aspects of HVAC-R work in Alaska are performed by skilled local workers. Without the generous support of STEP grants, our program would not be where it is today.

A decade ago, we recognized a critical shortage of trained HVAC-R Service Technicians. With the help of STEP, we launched a new apprenticeship program, hired a full-time instructor to develop curriculum, and invested in hands-on training equipment. What began with just three apprentices has grown into a robust program currently training 34 HVAC-R Service Technician apprentices.

We didn't stop there. STEP funding also enabled us to create a certified welding program. We became an Accredited Testing Facility through the American Welding Society and now maintain 37 AWS certifications. Recently, we further advanced the program by acquiring a laser welding machine to continue expanding training capacity.

Nearly 40% of HVAC-R Service Technicians in Alaska are non-residents—a clear indicator that our local workforce needs to grow. These are high-skill, high-wage jobs that offer long-term security and opportunity for Alaskans.

At the Alaska Metal & Mechanical Apprenticeship, we are currently training more apprentices than at any time since our establishment as a registered program in 1950. The demand for skilled workers continues to grow, and we must be prepared to meet it by diversifying and expanding our training offerings.

We sincerely thank Chair Bjorkman and the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee for sponsoring Senate Bill 159. We respectfully urge your support for its passage. This is a practical, high-return investment in Alaska's workforce and future.

Sincerely,

Bruce Bold
Training Coordinator
Alaska Metal & Mechanical Apprenticeship



ALASKA LABORERS TRAINING SCHOOL



Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

April 14, 2025

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We are writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 159, which proposes increasing the diversion from employee unemployment insurance contributions to the State Training and Employment Program (STEP) from 0.10% to 0.20% of taxable wages. This investment is both timely and essential to meeting Alaska's growing workforce development needs.

As a Statewide Director for Alaska Laborers Training School, we have relied on STEP funding to train new apprentices, as well as existing Journey Workers in the Construction Industry. The impact of this program on our participants and the broader community has been substantial. We have doubled the number of apprentices for the past 3 years, utilizing the same amount of funds and staff.

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board regularly receives far more STEP funding requests than are available for grants. At the same time, the cost of delivering high-quality training continues to rise, making each dollar more stretched than in years past. The current diversion is simply not enough to meet statewide workforce demand.

Our organization has seen firsthand how STEP supports employment in sectors with high non-resident hire rates and helps reduce future unemployment claims. By giving more Alaskans the opportunity to gain skills and secure steady employment, we are building a stronger, more self-reliant workforce across the state.

We thank Chair Bjorkman and Senate Labor and Commerce for sponsoring Senate Bill 159, and respectfully urge your support of its passage. It is a practical, high-return investment in Alaska's workforce and economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S. McCarthy", written over a faint, larger signature.

Suzanne McCarthy, Director
smccarthy@aklts.org

April 30, 2025

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senate Labor & Commerce Committee
State Capitol Room 105
Juneau AK, 99801
Senate.Labor.And.Commerce@akleg.gov

RE: AHHA Supports Senate Bill 159 – Increase STEP Diversion Rate

Dear Chair Bjorkman and Committee Members,

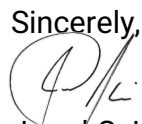
For over 70 years, the Alaska Hospital & Healthcare Association (AHHA) has served as a non-profit trade association representing Alaska's hospitals, nursing homes, and a growing number of healthcare partners across the continuum of care. AHHA members play an invaluable role, both as community providers and essential employers, in cities, towns, and villages across Alaska.

AHHA supports SB 159 and we view its proposed increase to the diversion from employee unemployment insurance contributions to the State Training and Employment Program (STEP) as a valuable investment for addressing Alaska's workforce development needs.

Our association and members have relied on STEP funding to help support training and education that allows Alaskans to work while they learn and become certified in high-demand entry level clinical positions. Over the last five years, STEP funding has helped support over 300 individuals earn their Certified Nursing Assistant certification.

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board regularly receives far more STEP funding requests than are available for grants. At the same time, the cost of delivering high-quality training continues to rise, making each dollar more stretched than in years past. By connecting more Alaskans with opportunities to gain skills and secure steady employment, we are building a stronger, resilient workforce that is crucial for our state and Alaska's healthcare system. We urge you to pass SB 159.

Thank you for considering this legislation and for your commitment to advancing healthcare for Alaska.

Sincerely,


Jared C. Kosin, JD, MBA
President & CEO