

# 34<sup>TH</sup> ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

## Session

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## Interim

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House Judiciary Committee, Chair

House Military and Veterans'  
Affairs, Committee Co-chair

Joint Armed Services Committee,  
Co-chair

House Health and Social Services  
Committee

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## REPRESENTATIVE ANDREW GRAY

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### House Bill 110 (34-0258\N)

### Sponsor Statement

**May 1, 2025**

House Bill 110 seeks to increase the number of social workers in Alaska by having Alaska join a multi-state social worker licensing compact. This effort aims to address the urgent and growing need for qualified social workers in Alaska as quickly as possible.

Alaska is currently experiencing a critical shortage of social workers across various sectors, including mental health, education, and services for vulnerable populations. We face significant challenges in retaining qualified professionals, with high turnover rates and increasing demand exacerbating the problem.

In response, the University of Alaska has launched targeted training programs, such as the school-based Social Work Education and Network Development initiative. This program prepares school-based social workers to meet urgent mental health needs in high-poverty areas. However, despite these efforts, the demand for social workers in Alaska continues to rise. In fact, the state projects a 13% increase in demand over the next three years.

Low wages, burnout, and limited opportunities for professional advancement contribute to ongoing recruitment and retention challenges. As a result, public assistance programs have experienced processing delays and growing case backlogs. Addressing the shortage of social workers is essential to strengthening Alaska's health, education, and protective services. This legislation can be part of the solution.

I respectfully ask for your support of House Bill 110.

## **House Bill 110 (34-0258\N)**

### **Sponsor Statement**

**May 1, 2025**

House Bill 110 aims to increase the number of social workers in Alaska through a multi-state licensing compact to help meet a clear, present and growing need for more social workers as soon as possible.

Alaska is currently facing a serious shortage of social workers across multiple sectors, including mental health, education, and services for vulnerable populations. We struggle to retain enough qualified professionals, with high annual turnover and growing demand worsening the issue. In response, the University of Alaska Anchorage School of Social Work has developed specialized training programs such as the School-Based Social Work Education and Network Development initiative, which prepares school-based social workers to address urgent mental health needs in high-poverty areas. Despite these efforts, the demand for social workers in Alaska continues to grow. In fact, the State predicts a 13% increase in demand over the next three years. Factors such as low wages, burnout, and limited opportunities for professional growth are contributing to difficulties in hiring and retaining staff. Public assistance programs have also suffered from processing delays and case backlogs. Addressing the social worker shortage is essential to strengthening health, education, and protective services across Alaska.

I would appreciate your support.