

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 21

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY SENATOR TOBIN

Introduced: 5/7/25

Referred: Education

A RESOLUTION

1 **Supporting and encouraging the continued recruitment and retention of international**
2 **educators on J-1 and H-1B visas in the state.**

3 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

4 **WHEREAS** the state is committed to providing students a high quality education and
5 ensuring each student has the opportunity to succeed academically and reach the student's full
6 potential; and

7 **WHEREAS** recruitment and retention of highly qualified educators is essential to the
8 success of the state's educational institutions, the future of the state's students, and the long-
9 term sustainability and well-being of the state's communities; and

10 **WHEREAS** many school districts in the state, particularly schools districts located in
11 rural and remote communities, face persistent shortages of qualified educators, especially in
12 the critical subject areas of math, science, and special education, which creates significant
13 challenges in maintaining consistent, high quality instruction and places added strain on
14 grades kindergarten through 12 and higher education institutions; and

15 **WHEREAS** a growing number of school districts in the state have hired international
16 educators through the J-1 and H-1B visa processes to address shortages and expand workforce

1 capacity; and

2 **WHEREAS** the J-1 visa, which is commonly used as a temporary, exchange-based
3 program to promote cross-cultural learning through educational and professional experiences,
4 and the H-1B visa, which is used to sponsor professionals in specialty occupations, provide
5 critical mechanisms for school districts in the state to fill teaching vacancies with experienced
6 and qualified educators; and

7 **WHEREAS** the Kuspuk School District began hiring international educators in 2020
8 to address persistent staffing shortages, and, from 2021 to 2025, 60 percent of the district's
9 teaching staff, on average, have worked under J-1 or H-1B visas, and more than half of the
10 district's schools have been staffed entirely by visa-holding educators; and

11 **WHEREAS** the Kodiak Island Borough School District began an H-1B visa
12 sponsorship program in 2022 and has since filled 22 teaching positions through the H-1B visa
13 process; and

14 **WHEREAS** the North Slope Borough School District faced a shortage of 50 teachers
15 in the district's remote village schools and successfully responded in 2022 by hiring qualified
16 international educators for H-1B positions from 2022 to 2024; and

17 **WHEREAS**, after initial success with educators on J-1 visas, the Bering Strait School
18 District transitioned to H-1B sponsorship to retain experienced teachers and filed
19 approximately 148 H-1B labor condition applications between fiscal year 2022 and fiscal year
20 2024; and

21 **WHEREAS** the independent efforts of a few remote school districts to meet staffing
22 shortages have since expanded into a statewide strategy, and the districts now attribute much
23 of an educational continuity to international educators, including educators who have credited
24 cohorts of visa-holding teachers, who make it possible to sustain school operations and
25 achieve the state's commitment to providing each student a high quality education and an
26 opportunity to succeed academically; and

27 **WHEREAS** the J-1 and H-1B visa programs allow international educators to
28 contribute to the education system by sharing specialized knowledge, skills, and expertise that
29 may not be readily available within the local workforce; and

30 **WHEREAS** educators from the Philippines have been among the most common
31 international hires in the state, widely recognized for a strong English proficiency,

1 comparable professional training, strong historical ties to the United States of America as an
2 allied nation dating as far back as the First and Second World Wars, a knowledge of the
3 nation's history and culture, and exceptional adaptability to life and teaching in the state's
4 diverse and remote communities; and

5 **WHEREAS** educators on J-1 and H1-B visas form strong connections to students,
6 families, and communities while working under the visas, and school districts see quality
7 training and positive outcomes from those relationships; and

8 **WHEREAS**, despite critical contributions to the state's schools, educators on J-1 and
9 H-1B visas often face significant challenges related to immigration status, including the
10 unpredictability of the duration of visas, restrictions on job mobility, and the varying periods
11 behind the processing times on immigration paperwork, which can affect an educator's
12 continued service in the state and compromise the state's ability to provide quality education
13 to its students; and

14 **WHEREAS** the continued success of the state's education system depends on the
15 support, retention, recruitment, and inclusion of skilled educators, especially educators on J-1
16 and H-1B visas, who are the most vulnerable members of the state's educational workforce;

17 **BE IT RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature strongly supports educators on
18 J-1 and H-1B visas and recognizes the vital roles those educators play in the state's
19 commitment to providing students a high quality education, ensuring each student has the
20 opportunity to succeed academically and reach the student's full potential, and enriching each
21 student's educational experience; and be it

22 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature encourages school
23 districts, higher education institutions, and other educational organizations to continue to
24 support the recruitment and retention of educators on J-1 and H-1B visas, particularly in areas
25 of the state experiencing an ongoing shortage of educators; and be it

26 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature encourages policymakers
27 at the state and federal levels to support the educational needs of the state's rural and remote
28 communities and the educators in those communities who are on J-1 and H-1B visas by
29 advocating for policies that acknowledge those educators as a vital part of the state's
30 workforce through adjusting or extending the status of the educators' visas when permissible,
31 increasing job mobility, and ensuring greater security for the international educators who

1 meaningfully contribute to the academic success of the state's students; and be it

2 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature reaffirms its commitment
3 to foster an educational environment in which educators, regardless of visa status, race,
4 ethnicity, nationality, or cultural background are valued, supported, and empowered to
5 provide high quality education to the state's students; and be it

6 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges state and federal
7 policymakers to take action to support the educational needs of the state's rural and remote
8 communities and the educators in those communities who are on J-1 and H-1B visas by
9 advocating for policies that provide pathways to support international educators, such as
10 adjusting or extending visa statuses, when possible, increasing job mobility, and ensuring
11 greater security for international educators who contribute meaningfully to the academic
12 success of the state's students and serve as a vital part of the state's workforce; and be it

13 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature strongly encourages the
14 members of the Alaska delegation in Congress, national leaders and advocates, and federal
15 policymakers to provide pathways for the continued recruitment and retention of international
16 educators and to preserve and protect the legal status of highly qualified and skilled educators,
17 especially educators on J-1 and H-1B visas whose invaluable contributions and
18 accomplishments prove integral to the success of the state's diverse education system.

19 **COPIES** of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Lisa Murkowski and the
20 Honorable Dan Sullivan, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Nicholas Begich, U.S.
21 Representative, members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.