



## ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Senator Löki Gale Tobin  
*Education Committee Chair*

EDUCATION  
HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES  
JUDICIARY  
TRANSPORTATION

### Sponsor Statement

#### SJR 21

SJR 21 supports the recruitment and retention of educators on J-1 and H-1B visas in Alaska schools.

Alaska's educational landscape faces unique challenges, particularly in rural and remote communities where attracting and retaining qualified teachers is a persistent issue. To address this, school districts increasingly rely on the J-1 and H-1B visa programs, which allow qualified international educators to teach in Alaska's schools.

The J-1 visa program, through its Exchange Visitor Program, has enabled teachers from countries around the world to share their expertise in Alaska's classrooms. A J-1 visa is a non-immigrant visa that functions as a work-and-study-based exchange visitor program overseen by the U.S. Department of State. These educators not only contribute to the academic growth of students but also enrich the cultural fabric of our communities.

Similarly, the H-1B visa program has facilitated the employment of highly skilled professionals in critical subject areas such as science, mathematics, and special education, where there is often a shortage of qualified candidates. Some school districts are looking at using H-1 B visas as an option to keep foreign teachers beyond five years, which is the maximum stay allowed under the J-1 visa program. Workers coming to the U.S. on an H-1B visa must meet certain requirements, such as having a bachelor's degree and special training. Employers must also fulfill obligations, including committing to pay foreign workers a fair wage and not displace U.S. employees.

The contributions of J-1 and H-1B educators are invaluable. They help bridge the gap in teacher shortages, particularly in specialized subjects and underserved areas. Their presence enhances the educational experience for all students, fostering a more inclusive and globally aware learning environment.

Supporting these visa programs is essential for the continued success of Alaska's educational system. It ensures that our students receive a high-quality education, regardless of their geographic location. By advocating for the retention and expansion of J-1 and H-1B visa opportunities for educators, we are investing in the future of Alaska's children and the strength of our communities.