



Alaska House State Affairs Committee

Written Testimony on HB 124 – AIDEA Accountability Act

January 29, 2026

Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on House Bill 124, the AIDEA Accountability Act. I offer these comments on behalf of the Susitna River Coalition (SRC), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the health of the Susitna River watershed and the salmon, wildlife, and communities that depend on it.

SRC has extensive experience engaging with large, state-facilitated infrastructure planning in the Susitna Basin, including recent direct engagement with the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) on the West Susitna Industrial Access Project. That experience informs our perspective on HB 124 and reflects repeated engagement with state development institutions operating under existing governance frameworks.

Through this engagement, we have encountered persistent barriers to meaningful public participation and information access. Board meetings are often structured around anticipation of opposition rather than collaborative problem-solving. Testimony is frequently taken before issues are fully discussed, executive sessions are lengthy and unpredictable, and opportunities for substantive dialogue are limited.

These challenges extend beyond meetings. SRC is currently more than six months into a public records request process involving repeated delays, proposed fees without clear policy grounding, and partial responses. Materials have been provided late and in limited form, often as individual email attachments rather than a complete record, making it difficult to evaluate project assumptions, timelines, or context. Over time, these conditions discourage good-faith participation and reinforce a posture of defensiveness rather than institutional learning.

Our experience with AIDEA's outreach efforts raises similar concerns. Many forums where substantive project discussion occurs appear limited to invitation-based or affiliated audiences. We have attended AIDEA-hosted events in Wasilla and Skwentna, including a barbecue and project update meetings, where attendance was dominated by contractors, consultants, or project affiliates, with limited representation from the broader public. At the same time, much of AIDEA's wider outreach has taken the form of paid promotion—radio advertisements, social media campaigns, booths at events,

and distribution of promotional materials. While promotion may raise awareness, it is not a substitute for community engagement, which requires listening, responding, and incorporating feedback into decision-making.

We have also attended AIDEA presentations that departed from basic professional norms expected of a public investment authority. At a regional economic conference in Wasilla, AIDEA's presentation was the only one delivered without slides or supporting materials, and it relied on broad generalizations—such as assertions that all roads are beneficial or that infrastructure automatically leads to economic prosperity—without reference to project-specific analysis, risk, uncertainty, or tradeoffs. At that presentation and others, agency staff stated that AIDEA funds are “not public money” or “not state money.”

While statutory distinctions may exist, this framing has practical consequences. AIDEA's capital originates in legislative appropriations, public assets, and public trust. How funds are characterized influences how decisions are made, how transparency is valued, and how responsive an institution remains to public concerns. The Authority's decisions therefore carry public risk and public consequence.

Taken together, these experiences reflect governance structures that rely heavily on downstream permitting processes to surface risk, rather than incorporating diverse expertise earlier—at the investment and planning stage. When conservation and community perspectives are absent from governance discussions, unresolved issues are pushed into permitting, litigation risk, and public controversy, creating more work for agency staff and less predictability for everyone involved.

That gap is visible beyond advocacy circles. SRC has been contacted by research firms working for large investors seeking basic environmental and social risk information related to AIDEA projects. We do not provide investment advice; we point researchers to public records when that information is not available in AIDEA's own materials, leaving outside analysts to reconstruct risk from scattered sources.

From an investment-governance perspective, this signals a structural problem. Institutions entrusted with public resources should be producing objective, decision-grade information internally. When that information must be pieced together externally, it underscores the need for stronger accountability and disclosure standards.

This lesson is not new. As early as the 1990s, the World Bank began changing how it evaluated projects after learning, often the hard way, that waiting until permitting to address environmental and social impacts was too late. Those lessons were later formalized in the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework, reflecting decades of experience showing that early engagement leads to better design, fewer conflicts, and more durable outcomes.

Within this context, a board member with relevant environmental and community expertise could serve as an efficient conduit for feedback—collating recurring concerns, surfacing material risks early, and providing a forum for thoughtful exchange outside the constraints of formal meeting agendas. That function would support, not burden, agency leadership and staff.

HB 124 responds directly to the governance, transparency, and accountability gaps described above by strengthening board oversight, improving transparency, and clarifying expectations for public institutions managing public resources. The bill also provides an important counterbalance at a time when the AIDEA Board has authorized expanded executive authority through measures such as Resolution G25-04, reflecting a broader trend toward concentration of authority that warrants careful legislative oversight in Alaska.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our experience and perspective.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melis Coady". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Melis" and last name "Coady" clearly distinguishable.

Melis Coady  
Executive Director  
Susitna River Coalition