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SENATOR Tom Begich

Senate Democratic Leader

SB 10: Free/Reduced Tuition for Essential Workers Sponsor Statement

Senate Bill #10 (EDU)

Version: 32-LS0127\B

During this unprecedented time, thousands of Alaskans have remained steadfast in their commitment to their communities. From restocking grocery shelves to delivering medicine, from hauling away our trash, to continuing to care for the most vulnerable amongst us, essential workers have provided the critical support our communities have needed during this pandemic. Now is the time to recognize the efforts and invest in this ready and able workforce. SB 10 establishes an Essential Worker Grant Program, leveraging the dedication of our frontline workers and providing a tuition free pathway for them to enhance and grow their professional capacity.

According to the US Department of Labor, rising levels of education attainment correlates to a 14% increase in output per hour worked in the private sector. In fact, data shows that the typical college graduate working full-time pays more than 80% in local, state, and federal taxes than the typical high school graduate. Investing in our essential workers will make Alaska more competitive and reduce strain on government financial assistance programs, reduce crime rates, and increase tax revenue and wages.

Research indicates that an overwhelming 93% of employees would stay at their companies longer if the company invested in their professional development. With declining population rates affecting all of Alaska, investing in our essential workforce will keep Alaskans here – working hard to stabilize, strengthen, and build back our economy.