

ALASKA RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

P.O. Box 1256
Kodiak, Alaska 99615
alaskaresearchconsortium.org

March 16, 2021

Re: TVEP Funding for Alaska Seafood Workforce Development

Dear Representative Fields, Representative Spohnholz and members of the Alaska House Labor and Commerce Committee,

My name is Jay Stinson, and I am from Kodiak, Alaska. I am president of a community/seafood industry non-profit called the Alaska Research Consortium (or ARC), that advocates for sustainable fisheries, marine science and the blue economy. I am writing to you regarding HB100.

Alaska's largest private employer is the seafood industry. Over 60,000 people are directly involved in harvesting and processing seafood and about 26,000 of them work in seafood processing. The seafood industry is a statewide venture. Alaska has over 166 shored-based seafood processing plants, 49 catcher-processor vessels and 10 large floating processors spread across our state from Metlakatla to Kotzebue. Seafood is by far the state's largest manufacturing employer and contributes \$172M in taxes, fees and self-assessments to fund government.

ARC recently completed an 18-month study of workforce training needs of the Alaska seafood processing industry. We surveyed 46 seafood plant managers and three catcher-processor companies, working for 24 companies based at 25 communities and representing over 15,000 workers. Eighty-eight percent of the survey responders said that additional training for seafood processing workers would be helpful to their business. Training priorities they identified included ammonia refrigeration operations, leadership and supervision skills, quality control, OSHA training, mechanical and electrical skills and many others. Our project also looks closely at engaging Alaska's youth in seafood processing careers. I have attached a copy of our report, completed last week, to this letter.

Regarding TVEP and HB100, our argument is simple. Annually seafood workers contribute about \$600,000 per year to the state's TVEP fund – these are private dollars contributed from paychecks into a fund dedicated toward vocational training. However, very little of the state's TVEP dollars targets training of seafood processing workers. Seafood leaders have identified their specific needs for workforce training, but these needs are not being currently met. TVEP is one obvious funding source since it comes directly from these workers.

ARC supports reauthorization of TVEP funding. Last year, we participated in the TVEP reauthorization process and asked the Legislature to consider a direct allocation of TVEP funds

targeted in support of seafood processor workforce training. There was considerable pushback from regional training centers and the University of Alaska who did not want any change, reduction or directive to their allocation of TVEP funds. The University of Alaska, in particular, asked ARC to use their competitive process to target programs for seafood processing workers. It was a "trust me, we'll take care of these needs" argument.

To this end, the University of Alaska now has in front of them a number of proposals that target seafood workforce training, including ammonia refrigeration operations and safety, supervision and leadership and quality control. We are following the process, as the University requested, and now are waiting to see if they will in fact, recognize and support this industry and its workforce with TVEP dollars.

We request that you amend the bill's language to urge that TVEP funds serve the Alaska seafood workforce's training needs. We also ask that you consider reauthorizing TVEP for only one year, to allow a review of whether the seafood processing industry is starting to be better served in a manner that reflects the sector's impact on jobs, manufacturing output, economic contributions and community resiliency. If not, we would appreciate the ability to return next year to look at alternatives.

The seafood processing industry is critical across our state and is often the largest, or the only, private source of employment in a coastal community. The Alaska Workforce Investment Board's vision is to "build connections that put Alaskans into good jobs." Supporting the Alaska seafood industry through workforce training is a strategic investment by Alaska in the future well-being of the state and our coastal communities for the future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jay Stinson, President
Alaska Research Consortium