



March 29, 2021

Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair Senate Finance Committee

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Senator Click Bishop, Co-Chair Senate Finance Committee

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Dear Co-Chairs Stedman and Bishop,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Senate Finance Committee's March 30 hearing on HB 76 (Extending COVID-19 Disaster Emergency).

PSPA is comprised of eight major seafood processing companies that purchase and process fish from harvesters from Ketchikan to Unalaska to St. Paul. These companies operate 25 facilities in 15 coastal communities across Alaska and three floating processors to serve remote locations. The health of commercial fisheries and the seafood industry is critical to Alaska, as it generates \$5 - \$6 billion in economic value in Alaska annually and creates more direct jobs (58,700) than any other private industry in the state.

Mitigating pandemic risks where our members process seafood has been the primary focus since the onset of COVID-19. Processing companies' objectives have been to protect workers and the communities in which they operate, maintain operations as a critical part of the U.S. seafood supply chain, and not overburden limited remote, rural healthcare systems. Very early in the pandemic, companies worked collaboratively with the State of Alaska DHSS, Unified Command, and local public health providers to identify and implement protocols and measures to prevent and minimize the spread of the virus on vessels and in processing plants. Seafood companies developed Community and Workforce Protection Plans, and have been subject to a comprehensive health mandate, now health advisory, specific to seafood processing operations.

The seafood sector continues to take a very conservative and strict approach to COVID-19 protection measures, which includes fundamental protocols included in Health Advisory 4, Appendix 1. These protection measures are comprised of two week entry quarantines (which include daily medical screening and multiple tests) for non-resident workers prior to working, daily medical screening on-site for all employees, continual surveillance testing of entire workforces at facilities and onboard vessels, safe transit, PPE, additional medical and sanitation staff and supplies; plant and cafeteria modifications; facilities to isolate employees and quarantine close contacts in case of positive cases; and enhanced security to monitor protocols, including closed campuses. Adhering to the State and CDC public health

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guidance has been the best possible way to protect our workforce, Alaska communities, and to stay operational.

Currently, the significant effort by the State of Alaska to distribute and vaccinate people living and working in Alaska is a game-changing situation. Our members are putting significant effort into vaccinations, as a high rate of vaccination of the seafood workforce will provide processing workers, fishermen, and those that depend on the seafood industry with a better ability to minimize risk of infection, as well as significantly minimize the risk of getting seriously ill if infected. DHSS and Unified Command have notified the seafood industry that additional guidance is forthcoming to specify how or whether protocols should change for seafood processing operations, depending on the level of vaccinations in a workforce and other potential factors.

PSPA has supported a continued COVID-19 disaster declaration in order to support the State of Alaska's need to continue the public health response in an efficient, effective, and coordinated manner, with full access to national resources available to the State. Should that comprehensive approach not be deemed possible, at a minimum, we believe the seafood industry needs the following to operate safely:

- State of Alaska/DHSS capacity to maintain an updated Health Advisory 4, Appendix 1, with modifications as needed to reflect new information, including as the seafood workforce gets vaccinated
- The authority necessary to reallocate and distribute vaccines and point-of-care diagnostic testing (and therapeutics or other resources) across the State effectively and efficiently

We recognize the ability to maintain a health advisory does not require new authority. But these two components, along with continued engagement and communication from the State's public health team, are fundamental to continuing to move forward safely and responsibly during the pandemic, in support of fishing communities and a coastal fishing economy across the State. We also understand additional authority is needed to retain access to federal relief funding, including for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. We are certain these authorities remain a priority for the legislature.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Barrows', with a stylized, cursive script.

Chris Barrows  
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