

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senator Mia Costello
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Senate Bill 159—Unemployment Benefits

Sponsor Statement

"An Act relating to unemployment benefits."

Unemployment insurance exists to provide Alaskans with necessary income when we are between jobs. The State of Alaska's current system determines how many weeks of benefits each Alaskan receives based on work history. Looking at the first four of the last five quarters, an individual who worked during all of them would receive more weeks of benefits than someone who worked seasonally or recently entered the workforce but was laid off.

By basing this critical lifeline on prior work history, the current unemployment system does not take into account whatsoever whether there are actually jobs available.

Instead of allotting weeks of benefits based on past work, Senate Bill 159 would base weeks of benefits on the unemployment rate—tying the duration of benefits to whether there are employment opportunities or not. SB 159 does not change the weekly dollar amount of benefit each individual is eligible to receive, just the length of time the benefit is available.

When there are few jobs available, whether someone worked annually or seasonally over the past year does not matter—finding a new job will be difficult. Similarly, when the economy is growing and many jobs are available, finding employment is easier. SB 159 would treat all Alaskans who are facing unemployment equally by considering the job market they are facing when determining the duration of benefits.

Determining weeks of unemployment benefits on whether jobs are available would save valuable resources when jobs are abundant in order to distribute a greater number of weeks of benefits to every Alaskan when jobs are difficult to find.