



REPRESENTATIVE JEREMY T. BYNUM


DISTRICT 1 | KETCHIKAN, SAXMAN, LORING, WRANGELL, MEYERS CHUCK,
METLAKATLA, COFFMAN COVE, WHALE PASS, & HYDER

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE | Alaska State Capitol, Room 400
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 24, 2025

TO: Chair and Committee Members,
House State Affairs Committee

FROM: Representative Jeremy T. Bynum 

RE: House Bill No. 75 Hearing Follow-Up

In follow-up to the State Affairs Committee hearings for HB75 on February 18th and February 22nd, I wanted to provide some additional clarifying information to the committee for consideration:

1. Clarification of Merchant Marine Language

A primary component of HB75 is clarifying allowable absences for eligibility to receive the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD). The bill ensures that students attending certain educational and vocational programs, including those related to the United States Merchant Marine Academy and accredited U.S. Coast Guard-approved training programs, are not penalized.

It is important to emphasize that this provision does not expand statutory protections for out-of-state employment or voluntary activities (such as Peace Corps service or Olympic participation). Instead, it preserves and aligns protections already granted to individuals whose careers require extensive training and certification outside Alaska.

The existing statute already permits allowable absences for those “*serving under foreign or coastal articles of employment aboard an oceangoing vessel of the United States merchant marine*”. HB75 merely clarifies that relevant educational programs required for such service should also qualify under existing allowances.

2. Written Testimony from February 21, 2025

We wanted address some of the points mentioned in the single piece of written testimony on HB75 provided to the committee. While we certainly appreciate the concerns expressed in that testimony, much of it relates to long-standing existing statutes regarding allowed absences and fingerprinting requirements for different professions.

- a. HB75 does not introduce new employment-based or voluntary absences; it only clarifies educational pathways related to these pre-existing statutory exceptions.



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- b. Medical absences: The bill ensures that unexpected, necessary medical absences do not count toward the cumulative 180-day voluntary absence limit, preventing unfair disqualification of Alaskans who require out-of-state medical care.

Additionally, HB 75 strengthens the integrity of the Permanent Fund Division by ensuring that employees handling sensitive financial and personal information undergo standardized national criminal history record checks. Many professions, such as nurses, attorneys, teachers, real estate brokers, investment advisers, and even massage therapists already require these checks. Given the significant fiduciary responsibilities of PFD administrators, requiring fingerprint-based background checks for these employees is a practical and responsible measure.

HB75 modernizes and clarifies existing laws to ensure that Alaskans who pursue essential educational programs remain eligible for their PFD. It also introduces appropriate security measures to protect the financial integrity of the PFD system and confidentiality of applicants. I appreciate your time and careful consideration of these points and look forward to further discussions on HB75. If you require any additional information or clarification, please do not hesitate to reach out to my office.