

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 24, 2020

3:35 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky, Chair  
Representative Ivy Spohnholz, Vice Chair  
Representative Matt Claman  
Representative Harriet Drummond  
Representative Geran Tarr

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Sharon Jackson  
Representative Lance Pruitt

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 255

"An Act relating to a waiver of work requirements or time limits in the food stamp program; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED HB 255 OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 255

SHORT TITLE: FOOD STAMPS; WORK REQS; TIME LIMITS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) JOSEPHSON

02/19/20	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/19/20	(H)	HSS
03/17/20	(H)	HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106
03/17/20	(H)	Heard & Held
03/17/20	(H)	MINUTE(HSS)
03/24/20	(H)	HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified on HB 255 as the sponsor of the bill.

ELISE SORUM-BIRK, Staff  
Representative Andy Josephson  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during discussion of HB 255, on behalf of the bill sponsor, Representative Josephson.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CHAIR TIFFANY ZULKOSKY** called the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:35 p.m. Representatives Zulkosky, Tarr, Drummond, Claman, and Spohnholz were present at the call to order.

**HB 255-FOOD STAMPS; WORK REQS; TIME LIMITS**

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CHAIR ZULKOSKY announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 255, "An Act relating to a waiver of work requirements or time limits in the food stamp program; and providing for an effective date."

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REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON, Alaska State Legislature, shared that the administration was seeking a more aggressive waiver, although, according to Department of Health and Social Services Commissioner Crum, the waiver would be sought only for the duration of the response to COVID-19. He paraphrased the Division of Public Assistance Director Shawnda O'Brien, who stated teams were working on implementation for all recipients of the SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) program for the duration of the state's efforts in dealing with the effect of the virus." He reflected that two of the leading administration officials had indicated a return to a "less aggressive" waiver. He offered his belief that the likelihood of the economic impacts would extend beyond the immediate response window.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON pointed out that, prior to this current "panic that there is in Alaska today," Alaska was in its worst economic strait relative to other states. He recounted that the unemployment rate in Alaska was in the range of 6 percent, the highest rate in the United States, and he expressed his

agreement with U.S. Senator [Lisa] Murkowski that Alaska policy should "take a more aggressive disposition toward seeking waivers." He acknowledged that although the current Alaska administration was sympathetic to the situation, there were indications of a return to the earlier philosophy for the "able-bodied adult approach" once COVID-19 is tamed or defeated. He declared that the proposed bill was still important and worthwhile.

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ELISE SORUM-BIRK, Staff, Representative Andy Josephson, Alaska State Legislature, added that roughly one-third of the current SNAP recipients worked in the service industry and these individuals were being hit particularly hard by the current situation. She shared an anecdote for the layoffs of employees in Anchorage. She reiterated that the economic impact of COVID-19 would not be limited to the duration of the response and would be felt much longer. She noted that this was a question for consistency in state policy and pointed to the need for something in law that said we needed to consistently be seeking the most we could from the federal government with regard to SNAP waivers for able-bodied adults without dependents. She declared this would be a good policy to have in place, as it would allow better planning for the future.

MS. SORUM-BIRK, in response to Representative Drummond, said that roughly 220 of 350 employees had been laid off.

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REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ commented that the group of people being impacted by the proposed bill were already working in the service industry, as administrative professionals, in sales, professional support, transportation, construction, and across industries and were already making every effort to earn enough money. She opined that they would all like to make more money and would prefer not to need SNAP benefits. She pointed out many people needed SNAP benefits to ensure adequate access to food, which was important to health, and hence, important to being able to work. She declared it was important to make a policy statement about this, that it was necessary for stability and not just during the COVID-19 dilemma. She pointed out there could be 25,000 restaurant and service workers heavily impacted who would need these benefits.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR shared her support, noting that legislation such as the proposed bill could reduce fear, worry, and anxiety.

CHAIR ZULKOSKY expressed her support for the need of consistency and stability for this policy. She opined Alaskans needed help "outside of the realm of political ideology," adding this was "a great step in the right direction for sound public policy when Alaskans [needed] it most."

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CHAIR ZULKOSKY opened public testimony.

[3:44:30 PM](#)

CHAIR ZULKOSKY closed public testimony.

[3:44:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ moved to report HB 255, Version 31-LS1556\M, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying zero fiscal notes. Without objection HB 255 was moved from the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee.

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#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.