

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 8

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY REPRESENTATIVES TARR, Foster, Hopkins, Drummond, Spohnholz, Josephson, Story

Introduced: 4/21/21

Referred: Community and Regional Affairs

A RESOLUTION

1 **Creating the House Task Force on Poverty and Opportunity.**

2 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:**

3 **WHEREAS**, according to the United States Bureau of the Census, in 2019, 10.1
4 percent of Alaskans, or 80,012 people, lived in poverty; and

5 **WHEREAS**, in 2019, 35,673 Alaskans lived in deep poverty, which is defined as a
6 total household income below 50 percent of the poverty threshold; and

7 **WHEREAS** communities of color in the state are disproportionately affected by
8 poverty; in 2019, 14.2 percent of African Americans, 10.8 percent of Latinx Americans, and
9 24 percent of American Indians or Alaska Natives lived in poverty, while the poverty rate
10 among non-Hispanic whites was 7 percent; and

11 **WHEREAS** Alaska Natives experience the highest rates of poverty in the state,
12 averaging approximately 31.8 percent statewide over the past 15 years; and

13 **WHEREAS**, in 2019, 26,771 children, 14.8 percent of children in the state, lived in
14 poverty; and

15 **WHEREAS** Alaska ranks 37th in the country in percentage of people in poverty; and

16 **WHEREAS** living in poverty is associated with lower life expectancy; high infant

1 mortality; poor reproductive health; higher rates of infectious diseases, including tuberculosis
2 and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV); higher rates of substance use, including tobacco,
3 alcohol, and illegal substances; higher rates of noncommunicable diseases; higher rates of
4 depression and suicide; and increased exposure to environmental risks; and

5 **WHEREAS** poverty is not purely economic but brings with it dependency,
6 oppression, social exclusion, and exploitation; and

7 **WHEREAS** other states have recognized the effects of structural racism, inequality,
8 and historical trauma as root causes of poverty; and

9 **WHEREAS** poverty reduces opportunities, limits choices, undermines hope, and
10 threatens the health and well-being of low-income Alaskans; and

11 **WHEREAS** many Alaskans who are living with a low income are kept out of poverty
12 by vital social safety net programs, the Alaska permanent fund dividend, Alaska Native
13 corporation dividends, and subsistence fishing, hunting, and gathering of natural foods; and

14 **WHEREAS** many families in the state with income above the federal poverty level
15 still struggle to meet basic needs, such as housing, food, transportation, childcare, and health
16 care; and

17 **WHEREAS** asset-limited, income-constrained, employed ("ALICE") individuals and
18 families are underrepresented in current data and discussions of poverty in the state; and

19 **WHEREAS** the "Healthy Alaskans 2020" state health improvement plan recognized
20 the need to address poverty in the state and determined that the state's health care and
21 education goals, among others, will not be met if the state does not make significant progress
22 in reducing the number of Alaskans living in poverty; and

23 **WHEREAS** the "Healthy Alaskans 2030" state health improvement plan continues to
24 prioritize addressing health indicators related to poverty, including chronic disease, health
25 care, nutrition, and education; and

26 **WHEREAS** anti-poverty funding is currently designated for welfare programs that
27 support low-income Alaskans, including vital safety net programs such as Temporary
28 Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance
29 Program (SNAP), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the Alaska Temporary Assistance
30 Program (ATAP), and housing and childcare assistance, all programs that are critical to the
31 health and well-being of Alaskans living in poverty; and

1 **WHEREAS** opportunities exist to enhance current welfare programs so that available
 2 resources will most effectively address the factors that keep Alaskans in poverty; and

3 **WHEREAS** the science surrounding the root causes of poverty has advanced in the
 4 past 55 years, resulting in a need to generate new conversations about the reasons poverty
 5 persists; and

6 **WHEREAS**, because poverty is complex and multidimensional, a multi-pronged,
 7 systemic evaluation of each root cause and type of poverty, and interactions within this
 8 dynamic system, needs to be conducted;

9 **BE IT RESOLVED** that the House of Representatives recognizes the immediate need
 10 for community dialogue and organization to bring innovative approaches to reducing the
 11 state's poverty rates and breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and prioritizing
 12 physical and behavioral health, food security, social justice, education, economic
 13 development, housing, the environment, and culture; and be it

14 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the House of Representatives hereby creates the House
 15 Task Force on Poverty and Opportunity; and be it

16 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the duties of the task force include

17 (1) examining how current statutes and regulations affect poverty and the
 18 intergenerational cycle of poverty;

19 (2) seeking input on best practices for poverty reduction from service
 20 providers, community-based organizations, legislators, state agencies, stakeholders, the
 21 business community, subject matter experts, and individuals with lived experience;

22 (3) recommending to the legislature means through which the legislature may
 23 foster dialogue, within the legislature and between the legislature and the public, regarding
 24 poverty and the intergenerational cycle of poverty;

25 (4) helping to create opportunities for public dialogue regarding issues
 26 surrounding poverty, including healthy and adequate housing, nutritious and affordable food,
 27 clean drinking water, proper sanitation, education, health care, and social services;

28 (5) preparing and making available to the public and the legislature
 29 informational materials for use in public dialogue about poverty and the intergenerational
 30 cycle of poverty and providing for translation of these materials into the languages spoken
 31 across the state; and

(6) submitting draft legislation and other material and recommending policy actions to the governor and the legislature to effectively reduce intergenerational poverty and promote and encourage economic self-sufficiency; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force consists of 23 members appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives as follows:

(1) four members of the public with lived experience, such as receiving welfare benefits;

(2) four members from nonprofit organizations conducting poverty alleviation work or social services;

(3) two members who are researchers in the field of economics or public health;

(4) four members from tribal governments, Native corporations, or nonprofits affiliated with a recognized tribe;

(5) one member from the house of representatives;

(6) one member from the senate;

(7) one member from a faith community;

(8) one member from an organization that advocates for immigrants or refugees;

(9) two members who work in municipal government for a municipality with fewer than 15,000 residents;

(10) two members who work in municipal government for a municipality with more than 15,000 residents; and

(11) one member representing senior citizens and elders; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that

(1) a majority of the members of the task force constitutes a quorum;

(2) the task force may meet as often as necessary on a schedule determined by the members of the task force;

(3) the task force may meet during and between legislative sessions;

(4) members of the task force serve without compensation and are not entitled to per diem or reimbursement of travel expenses;

(5) the task force may conduct meetings in person or virtually;

- 1 (6) the task force terminates December 31, 2022; and
- 2 (7) not later than December 31, 2022, the task force shall deliver to the
- 3 speaker of the house of representatives, the president of the senate, the chief clerk of the
- 4 house of representatives, and the senate secretary a final report with legislative
- 5 recommendations and notify the legislature that the report is available.