

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

April 28, 2022

3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Shelley Hughes, Chair
Senator Robert Myers, Vice Chair
Senator David Wilson
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Lyman Hoffman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 298 (CRA) AM
"An Act establishing the Alaska Food Strategy Task Force; and
providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 298

SHORT TITLE: ALASKA FOOD STRATEGY TASK FORCE

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) SNYDER

02/04/22	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/04/22	(H)	CRA
03/15/22	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/15/22	(H)	Heard & Held
03/15/22	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/17/22	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/17/22	(H)	Heard & Held
03/17/22	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/24/22	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/24/22	(H)	Moved CSHB 298(CRA) Out of Committee
03/24/22	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
04/04/22	(H)	CRA RPT CS(CRA) 6DP 1NR
04/04/22	(H)	DP: MCCARTY, DRUMMOND, MCCABE, PRAX, HANNAN, SCHRAGE
04/04/22	(H)	NR: PATKOTAK

04/14/22 (H) BEFORE HOUSE IN THIRD READING
04/14/22 (H) CALL FOR THE QUESTION WITHDRAWN
04/14/22 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
04/14/22 (H) VERSION: CSHB 298 (CRA) AM
04/19/22 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/19/22 (S) CRA
04/28/22 (S) CRA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE LIZ SNYDER
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 298.

ARIELLE WIGGIN, Staff
Representative Liz Snyder
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional analysis for HB 298
on behalf of the sponsor.

HEATHER MCCARTY, Fisheries Consultant
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Provided invited in support of HB 298.

AMY SEITZ, Executive Director
Alaska Farm Bureau;
Chair, Alaska Food Policy Council
Soldotna, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Provided invited testimony in support of HB
298.

TIKAAN GALBREATH, Associate Director
Technical Assistant Network
Intertribal Agriculture Council
Fairbanks, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Provided invited testimony in support of HB
298.

ROBBI MIXON, Executive Director
Alaska Food Policy Council
Homer, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 298.

CLAIRE LUBKE, Program Director
St. Francis House Food Pantry
Catholic Social Services

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 298.

PHOEBE AUTRY, Interim Executive Director

Alaska Farmland Trust

Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 298.

ALAN BUDAHL, Executive Director

Lutheran Social Services of Alaska;

Co-Chair, Alaska VOAD

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 298.

RON MEEHAN, Policy and Advocacy Manager

Food Bank of Alaska;

Manager, Alaska Food Coalition

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 298.

LINDA BEHNKEN, Executive Director

Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association

Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 298.

JAMIE MORGAN, Government Relations Regional Lead

American Heart Association

Sacramento, California

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 298.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:30:20 PM](#)

CHAIR SHELLEY HUGHES called the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Gray-Jackson, Myers, Wilson, and Chair Hughes.

HB 298-ALASKA FOOD STRATEGY TASK FORCE

[3:30:44 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES announced the consideration of CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 298(CRA) am "An Act establishing the Alaska Food Strategy Task Force; and providing for an effective date."

[3:31:16 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LIZ SNYDER, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of HB 298, voiced excitement about the positive energy that is focused on improving food security throughout the state by improving access to healthy foods and growing the food economy. She expressed support for the governor's Alaska Food Security and Independence Task Force, the legislature's Alaska Grown Caucus, and the broad suite of stakeholders involved in food production, harvest, distribution, and consumption. She continued to introduce HB 298 speaking to the following sponsor statement:

HB 298 establishes the Alaska Food Strategy Task Force, a multidisciplinary task force on Alaska's food systems and sovereignty with the goal of improving food security for the long-term benefit of Alaska's communities, economy, and environment. Sitting members will come from various communities and interests and be representative of Alaska's diverse population.

Alaska faces both significant challenges and opportunities with respect to food systems and food security. We are a geographically remote state with expansive borders but have millions of acres of arable land. We rely heavily on food imports, but also have thriving traditions of hunting, fishing, and gathering and a robust seafood industry. We are increasingly susceptible to shifts in hydrological regimes and forest fires but are also home to an abundance of fresh water and have a future of extended growing seasons.

The Alaska Food Strategy Task Force seeks to take advantage of our strengths and provide sound, data-driven policy recommendations to grow our food system. It will do this by providing policy, legislation, and implementation strategy recommendations for strengthening Alaska's food systems in six integrated focus areas:

- 1) Sustainably growing the agriculture industry;
- 2) Sustainably growing markets for locally grown, locally harvested, and locally processed foods;
- 3) Enhancing the climate for food and beverage businesses;
- 4) Minimizing food waste and diverting it from the waste stream;

- 5) Improving connectivity, efficiencies, and outcomes in state-run programs affecting food availability and access; and
- 6) Ensuring food security in rural and urban communities.

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER highlighted that a seventh integrated focus area was added in the other body to increase emphasis on transportation and infrastructure.

HB 298 was created in collaboration with stakeholders such as the Alaska Food Policy Council, the Alaska Farm Bureau, and the Food Bank of Alaska, who want to grow Alaska's food system and economy. It looks to find long-term solutions and untapped economic potential for our state. I hope you can join me in supporting this bill and urge you to reach out to my office with any questions or concerns.

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER stated that because 95 percent of Alaskans' commercially available food comes from outside the state, it's very easy to imagine what would happen if that supply-chain were interrupted for any length of time. This also means that about \$2 billion of Alaskans' money is leaving the state when it could be redirected to support and diversify local economies by growing and harvesting food within the state.

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER described the composition of the task force's executive board. Its membership is comprised of Alaska Food Policy Council board members, two legislators from each body with equal minority and majority representation, state commissioners from relevant departments, and public members who work in related fields. Over the course of about two years, the task force will provide policy, legislation, and strategies for implementation. The task force is designed to be part of the solution for Alaska's food system insecurity challenges through comprehensive engagement with policymakers and community members.

SENATOR HUGHES requested the sectional analysis.

[3:38:06 PM](#)

ARIELLE WIGGIN, Staff, Representative Liz Snyder, Anchorage, Alaska, presented the sectional analysis for HB 298 on behalf of the sponsor. It read as follows:

Sec. 1: Adds legislative intent language to the uncodified law of the State of Alaska to establish the Food Strategy Task Force

Sec. 2: Adds a new section to the uncodified law of the State of Alaska describing the composition and function of the Alaska Food Strategy Task Force.

(a)-(d) outlines the composition of the Task Force. The Task Force will consist of 9 executive board members, and an additional 26 members, all of whom serve on the advisory committees addressing the six integrated focus areas as described in section 2(j).

- The 9 members of the Executive Board will be:
 - Five members of the Alaska Food Policy Council (AFPC) selected by the governing board
 - Four members of the legislature appointed jointly by the president of the senate and speaker of the house of representatives
 - Two members will be from the senate and two from the house of representatives
 - At least one member must be a member of the minority of the senate or the house
- The following commissioners or their designees shall serve as members of the task force:
 - The Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources, or their designee
 - The Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game, or their designee
 - The Commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services, or their designee
 - The Commissioner of the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, or their designee
 - The Commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development, or their designee
 - The Commissioner of the Department of Transportation, or their designee
- 21 members, selected by the executive board, shall include the following:
 - One member from a mariculture development organization
 - One member from an agricultural development organization
 - One member from a fisheries-related organization

- o One member from a local food marketing organization
- o One member from a hunger and nutrition organization
- o One member from an economic development organization
- o One member from the food distribution or transportation industry
- o Two members from Alaska Native or intertribal organizations or Alaska Tribal governments addressing food sovereignty
- o Two members who are Alaska food producers
- o Two members from the food service industry o One youth member
- o One member each from the faculty at the University of Alaska Anchorage, the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the University of Alaska Southeast, and Alaska Pacific University
- o Three members selected to provide additional expertise in food system development

(e)-(i) Provides general guidance for board governance, specifically:

- Instructs the executive board to select members to provide expertise in key areas of food system activity
- Instructs the executive board to select the chair and vice chair annually from members of the executive board.
- Indicates members will serve without compensation.
- Subjects the Task Force to the Open Meetings Act (AS 44.62.310 - 44.62.319) and the Alaska Public Records Act (AS 40.25.100-40.25.295) and instructs them to meet during and between legislative sessions to accomplish its duties
- Allows the executive board to remove a member of the Task Force, if that member misses more than two meetings in a calendar year and has not been previously excused, or if they are not contributing in a meaningful way to the activities of the Task Force

(j)-(m) Directs and provides guidance for the Alaska Food Strategy Task Force to create advisory committees to present state policy, legislation, and

implementation strategy recommendations in [seven] areas:

1. Sustainably growing the agriculture industry
2. Sustainably growing markets for locally grown, locally harvested, and locally processed foods
3. Enhancing the climate for food and beverage businesses
4. Minimizing food waste and diverting it from the waste stream
5. Improving connectivity, efficiencies, and outcomes in state-run programs affecting food availability and access
6. Ensuring food security in rural and urban communities.
7. Improving transportation and infrastructure to transfer and deliver food in the state.

Each task force member shall serve on one or more of these advisory committees. Recommendations created by the Task Force must address:

- o Public, non-profit, and private investment and infrastructure
- o Regulatory issues
- o Research and development needs
- o Environmental changes
- o Workforce development needs
- o Infrastructure needs
- o High food costs and food access
- o Food safety
- o Varying scales of food system development
- o Innovative technologies for the Circumpolar North
- o Adaptation of successful food systems policies, models, and programs across the Circumpolar North and other US states
- o Alaska Tribal relations as they pertain to food security and food sovereignty
- o Emergency preparedness

Task force recommendations must also be:

- o Evidence-based
- o Stakeholder-informed
- o Economically sound
- o Environmentally sustainable
- o Equitable

(o) Requires the Task Force to present recommendations on half of the integrated focus areas by August 1, 2023 and the other half by August 1, 2024 in a report format. They must also submit the report to the appropriate officials and notify the legislature that the report is available.

Sec. 3: Addresses the DHSS split and subsequent change in commissioners.

Sec. 4: Adds a new section to the uncodified law of the State of Alaska that instructs the Alaska Food Strategy Task Force to begin work by December 1, 2022, or as soon as a majority of members have been selected

Sec. 5: Repeals Sections 1 and 2 of this Act on June 30, 2025

Sec. 6: Adds an effective date of July 1, 2022, for section 3 alone.

Sec. 7: Adds an immediate effective date under AS 01.10.070(c) Time Statutes Become Law and Take Effect, except as provided in section 6.

[3:40:19 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS asked for an explanation of the goal of the third integrated focus area of the task force identified on page 4 line 7:

(3) enhancing the climate for food and beverage businesses;

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER answered that it's not so much looking at restaurants and areas where there is already great growth and success such as with breweries, distilleries, and farmers markets. It's more about promoting things like online sales hubs for food producers and processors; addressing issues related regulations and policies that may be hindering certain new areas of food-related businesses; regulations about safety; and startup incentives for certain lines of business that might be seen in circumpolar countries but not in Alaska. She said she understands how that may be misinterpreted and she would welcome suggestions to tighten the language.

[3:42:36 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS said he appreciates the illumination and agrees that Alaska may be lagging in food processing.

3:43:18 PM

SENATOR D. WILSON referenced Section 2 and noted that on page 3, line 3, paragraph (11) identifies one youth as a task force member. He asked for an explanation.

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER answered that the thinking was that it would be someone under age 18 who is involved in 4-H or gardening, or some other documented interest in some aspect of the Alaska food system.

SENATOR D. WILSON said he was trying to understand why the task force should have multiple seats from the same or similar sectors and whether that would make it too large to function as intended.

3:45:22 PM

SENATOR HUGHES asked how a task force with 36 members would function, who would be charged with managing the people, and whether legislative staff would be used to provide staffing.

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER answered that it is being set up to cover the areas of expertise needed from food production, to harvest, to processing, to distribution, to access to marketing, to food safety, to cultural appropriateness, to disposal. The idea is that the task force will create integrative food strategy for the state.

She agreed that each of the university campuses would have multiple seats. The reason is that there is broad expertise across the different campuses and they all could make useful contributions to the conversation. She also believes it is a good idea to have broad representation from the different geographic areas of the state. University faculty are also accustomed to working in these types of groups to help coordinate, collaborate, and generate documentation and reports. They will bring valuable skillsets to this large group.

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER noted that Heather McCarty had been invited to testify. She is the former Chair of the Mariculture Task Force and a lot of the bill was inspired by that task force. First, that work is very recent, second it was focused on a component of the larger food system, and third it was exceptionally successful. At least two pieces of legislation have been introduced as a direct result of that task force, they

helped reduce lease application backlogs, streamlined the application process, and developed a training center. HB 298 is a bit more explicit in the areas of expertise, but it was modeled on the Mariculture Task Force. It had 11 members on what was called the "task force proper" and additional members worked on advisory groups so the size was similar to this task force. She suggested that Ms. McCarty could talk about how the group was able to coordinate and be productive.

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER confirmed that legislators who serve on the task force would dedicate some of their staff to assist with administrative tasks associated with the task force. The Alaska Food Policy Council recently received a USDA grant for data gathering and stakeholder engagement activities statewide that will work in parallel with this task force. They also have resources to contribute to administering the work of this task force.

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SENATOR HUGHES turned to invited testimony on HB 298.

[3:51:58 PM](#)

HEATHER MCCARTY, Fisheries Consultant, Juneau, Alaska, stated that she was the vice chair then the chair of the Mariculture Task Force that sunsetted last summer. She briefly described how it worked. The task force proper had 11 members and then there were working groups that worked on specific aspects of the development of mariculture. Each of the working groups was chaired by a member of the task force proper who had the responsibility of transmitting all the work back to the task force proper. The task force proper and the working groups met separately. The task force proper met about once a month in public meetings. In the beginning just two or three members of the public attended the meetings but as interest grew across the state more people attended. Towards the end of the life of the task force 30-40 members of the public would attend the meetings. The working groups would meet when called by the chairs and those meetings were also open for public participation. Each working group drew members from the industry who had specific areas of expertise in mariculture, ranging from research to marketing. At the end of the five-year life of the task force, there was an enormous body of information and recommendations that went into the report to the governor. Most of the work was done in the working groups, which was very effective, but the task force proper put it all together into the report. She described it as an effective way to do business.

[3:55:24 PM](#)

AMY SEITZ, Executive Director, Alaska Farm Bureau; Chair, Alaska Food Policy Council, Soldotna, Alaska, stated that both organizations recognize the need for a comprehensive strategy to build a resilient food system in Alaska. The food system in Alaska has been reliant on the production of food, the workforce, and long-distance shipping from other states and countries for far too long. This has made Alaska vulnerable to disruptions and caused it to miss out on about \$2 billion per year by relying on imported foods. She highlighted that with the pandemic, the supply chain is not returning to normal very quickly. Shelves are still empty and the price of food is continuing to rise.

MS. SEITZ emphasized that it was time to work collaboratively with the stakeholders in the food system to shape a strategy to build a robust food system in Alaska. The different sectors must work together, not in silos. The task force established under HB 298 will bring together experts from various industries and sectors of the food system to share their expertise. Importantly, there will also be input from state agencies and legislators. HB 298 and the governor's task force fit together. The Food Security and Independence Task Force will start soon, has a shorter timeframe, and will provide recommendations to work on over the fall and winter. HB 298 has a longer timeline and it will build on the information from the governor's task force in order to develop a strategy for building a resilient food system for Alaska.

[4:00:06 PM](#)

TIKAAN GALBREATH, Associate Director, Technical Assistant Network, Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC), Fairbanks, Alaska, recounted the history of IAC including that it was established in 1987 to focus on conservation development and agricultural resources for the betterment of its people. He said global events are showing the need to evaluate the sustainability of food systems. IAC recognizes this need and invests time and energy in an array of diverse services. He described Alaska's position as unique, because in many cases the state does not have existing infrastructure. This makes it easier moving forward to imagine a future that Alaskans want to see. There is an opportunity to develop a resilient and robust food system that provides food, builds the economy, and reduces contributions to the global carbon footprint.

MR. GALBREATH stated that part of the Technical Assistant Network is funded under the national network. Technical

assistant specialists in each region are available to support tribes and tribal producers to accomplish the goals of food sovereignty. He highlighted that in Alaska he is starting to see more Alaskan-made food and food products in homes. There should be more of this because meals that are all Alaskan grown, harvested, and caught brings people together, builds community, and makes a more resilient state economy. Collectively, Alaska Native people are the largest private landholders in the state. In most cases, that land was selected based on the traditional uses and availability of food resources. Alaska Natives generally value the ability to continue to practice traditional ways of life while ensuring food security in their communities.

MR. GALBREATH asked the committee members to consider whether they would want to live in Alaska if all its food resources disappeared. He encouraged support for HB 298 as a meaningful step in supporting these resources.

[4:06:50 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES opened public testimony on HB 298.

[4:07:14 PM](#)

ROBBI MIXON, Executive Director, Alaska Food Policy Council, Homer, Alaska, testified in support of HB 298 on behalf of AFPC. She described AFPC's goal to create a healthier, more secure, and self-reliant Alaska through a stronger, more equitable, and sustainable food system. It is a small group with a large reach and great expertise. She mentioned statewide working groups and partnership grants that seek to connect local food system organizations. AFPC has done asset mapping to identify unique capacities for Alaska's food systems as well as barriers. She opined that the training and resources AFPC has gathered over the past ten years will be an asset for the task force proposed in HB 298. She concluded that there are tremendous challenges ahead, but AFPC believes in the vision of food security and is in full support of HB 298.

[4:10:56 PM](#)

CLAIRE LUBKE, Program Director, St. Francis House Food Pantry, Catholic Social Services, Anchorage, Alaska, stated support for HB 298 as a robust, holistic, and strategic way to address food insecurity in Alaska. She advised that she would relay a short message from CEO Robin Dempsey about the work Catholic Social Services (CSS) does and how it relates to the Food Strategy Task Force.

MS. LUBKE recounted that during FY 2021, CSS served more than 12,000 people in Anchorage. Last month there were 1,800 visits to the food pantry. CSS sees how food insecurity impacts lives and communities and understands the need to improve food systems. She cited more data to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation. She highlighted the positive contribution that the Refugee Assistance and Immigration Services Program is making to combat food insecurity in Anchorage. Through agricultural programming, CSS is working to strengthen systems that provide local, freshly grown produce to underserved neighborhoods and provide opportunities for clients to become food entrepreneurs. She opined that the results would be overwhelmingly positive if HB 298 were to implement similar initiatives statewide. The Food Strategy Task Force will consider multiple facets of the food system while giving communities a critical voice at the table. This will result in better outcomes for those in need and the economy.

[4:14:24 PM](#)

PHOEBE AUTRY, Interim Executive Director, Alaska Farmland Trust (AFT), Palmer, Alaska, testified in support of HB 298 on behalf of AFT. She described AFT as a nonprofit whose primary mission is to permanently protect Alaska's valuable agricultural soils and support a thriving food system that will provide Alaskans with healthy food and keep farmers farming. She stated that AFT believes that the Food Strategy Task Force established under 298 is essential to create an inclusive localized opportunity for stakeholders to collaborate on strategies to address food security for all Alaskans. On a daily basis, AFT sees the multilayered problems with Alaska's food system that make the state very vulnerable. Shelves can be empty in the depth of winter, but the effect of the global pandemic on grocery store shelves is particularly worrisome for underserved Alaskans. AFT believes that a strong agricultural economy and a vibrant food system will not only improve food security but also diversify the state economy and make it more sustainable. The Food Strategy Task Force created under HB 298 will provide a path forward and the best opportunity to increase food security in Alaska. The Alaska Farmland Trust fully supports HB 298.

[4:16:33 PM](#)

ALAN BUDAHL, Executive Director, Lutheran Social Services of Alaska (LSSA); and Co-Chair of Alaska VOAD, a volunteer organization that is active during disasters, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 298. He stated that LSSA has seen such a large increase in the number of people who are seeking assistance in obtaining food that the government is now allowing

weekly visits to the food pantries in Anchorage. There has also been a sharp increase in the number of seniors who need assistance. Pre-pandemic there were 152 on the food pantry's "Senior Box List" and today there are 495 seniors on that list. There are also many more families and households visiting the mobile food pantry in the parking lot of the Lutheran Church of Hope. Pre-pandemic 100-120 households visited this weekly food bank and yesterday 210 households were served.

MR. BUDAHL said there is a clear need for the Food Strategy Task Force that will be formed if HB 298 were to pass. He is also interested because two Lutheran congregations started gardens in the last several years to help the food pantry, and last year they produced 2.5 tons of produce. Now a third congregation has expressed interest in starting a garden. This needs to be encouraged and the Food Strategy Task Force can do that.

MR. BUDAHL said he also wanted to highlight that the Alaska Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) is always working to ensure that a food supply is ready in the event of disaster and transportation is available to get the food to the disaster. He thanked the committee for its consideration of HB 298.

[4:20:00 PM](#)

RON MEEHAN, Policy and Advocacy Manager, Food Bank of Alaska; and Manager, Alaska Food Coalition, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of HB 298, reading the following prepared statement:

The Alaska Food Coalition consists of more than 160 partners from every corner of Alaska representing food banks and pantries, state agencies, tribal councils, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, among others. We advocate for state and federal policies to reduce food insecurity, build healthy communities, and promote access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food through the cultivation of a strong anti-hunger network. HB 298 will reinforce our efforts to ensure all Alaskans have enough nutritious food for a healthy life, and will help us create a stronger and more sustainable food system. Alaskans face unique challenges to food production and maintaining access to nutritious foods due to our geographic isolation and the distance between our communities. Finding solutions to overcome these barriers will require research and collaboration among the different food sectors and from the different

regions of our state. The task force created by HB 298 will allow for this necessary broad representation among the stakeholders of Alaska's food system while also giving communities across Alaska a voice at the table. Focusing policy and implementation recommendations on sustainably growing the agricultural industry, improving efficiencies and outcomes in state-run programs, and ensuring food security in both rural and urban communities stands to substantially benefit all Alaskans. This legislation supports this while also strengthening markets for locally grown, harvested, and processed foods. Ultimately, the formation of a robust food security task force stands to greatly enhance Alaska's food system, and we are enthusiastic about the research and projects that HB 298 will provide.

[4:22:19 PM](#)

LINDA BEHNKEN, Executive Director, Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association (ALFA), Sitka, Alaska, testified in support of HB 298. She stated that ALFA recognizes the importance of developing a comprehensive statewide strategy to strengthen Alaskan's food systems, improve food security for all Alaskans, and encourage more food to be locally grown, harvested, and distributed. She highlighted that seafood is an important component of food security in Alaska. More than 50 percent of the seafood harvested in US waters is harvested off Alaska, but just one percent of that harvest stays in Alaska.

MS. BEHNKEN reported that in 2010 ALFA launched Alaskans Own. It is the first community-supported fishery program in the state to increase the availability of local seafood and build connections between residents who value Alaska's sustainable seafoods and the fishermen who catch it. Alaskans Own provides high-quality seafood that is caught by local fishermen, processed locally, and distributed throughout the state with a forward funded subscription program. Because of this network, ALFA was well positioned to help families in need when the pandemic hit and food shortages proliferated. With many project partners, ALFA was able to provide more than 630,000 seafood meals to Alaskan families in need as well as some in the Lower 48. With funding from a USDA regional food system planning grant, ALFA is currently working to continue distribution. ALFA recognizes that Alaska's food system is vulnerable and believes it is important for Alaskans to support Alaskans both in times of need and times of plenty. This is more important than ever and HB 298 is an important step to meet the challenges and seize the

opportunities. She urged the committee to support the legislation and task force it would create.

[4:25:19 PM](#)

JAMIE MORGAN, Government Relations Regional Lead, American Heart Association (AHA), Sacramento, California, testified in support of HB 298. She stated that AHA advocates for state and federal policies that reduce food insecurity, build healthy communities, and promote access to affordable and nutritious food. She relayed that HB 298 is consistent with AHA's efforts to ensure that all Alaskans have access to healthy food, which will ultimately help communities thrive.

[4:26:17 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES closed public on HB 298.

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON said she was concerned initially about the size of the task force, but she has come to understand why so many varied entities are involved.

SENATOR HUGHES commented that it will take money to make a transformative, systematic change to Alaska's food system. She posited that the three task force members selected "to provide additional expertise in food system development" may be the avenue to provide that. She wanted that observation on the record.

CHAIR HUGHES referenced subsection (i) on page 3 that addresses the removal of a member of the task force. It read:

(i) The executive board may remove a member of the task force if the member misses more than two meetings in a calendar year without being previously excused or if the member does not contribute in a meaningful way to the activities of the task force. Vacancies on the task force shall be filled in the same manner as the original selection.

CHAIR HUGHES asked if this also applied to the "sub work groups."

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER answered no; the remaining 21 members of the task force are selected by the executive board. Her vision was that if a member was removed, the executive board would find a replacement. This language came from the Mariculture Task Force. She expressed willingness to add specificity to the language if that was the committee's desire.

CHAIR HUGHES asked for confirmation that this only applied to the 21 members of the task force that were not on the executive board or any of the six commissioners.

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER answered that is what was envisioned.

CHAIR HUGHES mentioned Mr. Galbreath's testimony about Alaska's bounty. She asked if there was research to support the notion that foods that are grown, caught, or harvested locally are healthier.

[4:28:44 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER answered yes; she is aware of studies both on the antioxidant content in wild harvested blueberries compared to store bought as well as evidence that the nutrients in produce degrade with age. She also recalled that the Division of Agriculture held a taste test that found Alaska grown carrots were much sweeter than store bought. She said the science is that the cooler nights converts more sugars into the carrot. A body of literature also documents the cultural appropriateness of foods and the relationship to mental health and social well-being. The availability of familiar healthy foods in hospital environments is also associated with faster recuperation. Another body of evidence suggests that allergies can be reduced by consuming foods that come from a person's local environment. She offered to gather the information if that was of interest.

CHAIR HUGHES said it seems like common sense and it's always nice when science supports a "gut feeling." She reviewed several items that would appear in the forthcoming Senate Committee Substitute and raised the idea of establishing a special committee in both the House and Senate to address food security.

[4:35:23 PM](#)

CHAIR HUGHES held HB 298 in committee.

[4:35:43 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Hughes adjourned the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 4:35 p.m.