

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 17, 2021

9:03 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Roger Holland, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Shelley Hughes  
Senator Peter Micciche  
Senator Tom Begich

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 32

"An Act establishing the Alaska middle college program for public school students; and relating to the powers of the University of Alaska."

- MOVED SB 32 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 36

"An Act relating to reporting requirements of the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska."

- MOVED CSSB 36(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 10

"An Act establishing a grant program to provide to essential workers the tuition and fees to attend a state-supported postsecondary educational institution."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 32

SHORT TITLE: COLLEGE CREDIT FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) STEVENS

01/25/21           (S)           PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21

01/25/21 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/25/21 (S) EDC, FIN  
03/08/21 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205  
03/08/21 (S) Heard & Held  
03/08/21 (S) MINUTE(EDC)  
03/17/21 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 36

SHORT TITLE: U OF A REGENTS REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

01/25/21 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21  
01/25/21 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/25/21 (S) EDC, FIN  
03/08/21 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205  
03/08/21 (S) Heard & Held  
03/08/21 (S) MINUTE(EDC)  
03/17/21 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 10

SHORT TITLE: FREE/REDUCED TUITION FOR ESSENTIAL WORKER

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) BEGICH

01/22/21 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21  
01/22/21 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/22/21 (S) L&C, EDC, FIN  
02/08/21 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)  
02/08/21 (S) Moved SB 10 Out of Committee  
02/08/21 (S) MINUTE(L&C)  
02/10/21 (S) L&C RPT 4DP 1NR  
02/10/21 (S) NR: COSTELLO  
02/10/21 (S) DP: GRAY-JACKSON, STEVENS, HOLLAND,  
REVAK  
03/17/21 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

**WITNESS REGISTER**

CHRIS REITAN, Superintendent  
Craig City School District  
Craig, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 32 with one concern.

NORM WOOTEN, Director of Advocacy  
Association of Alaska School Boards  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke about concerns with SB 32.

TIM LAMKIN, Staff  
Senator Gary Stevens  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions about SB 32.

SCOTT MACMANUS, Superintendent  
Alaska Gateway School District  
Tok, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 32.

PATRICK MAYER, Superintendent  
Aleutians East Borough School District  
Sandpoint, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke about concerns with SB 32.

LISA PARADY, Ph.D., Executive Director  
Alaska Council of School Administrators  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke about concerns with SB 32.

DEENA BISHOP, Ph.D., Superintendent  
Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 32.

PAUL LAYER, Ph.D., Vice President  
Academics, Students, and Research  
University of Alaska  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 32.

ED KING, Staff  
Senator Roger Holland  
Alaska State Legislature

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Explained the committee substitute for SB 36.

PAUL LAYER, Vice President  
Academics, Students, and Research  
University of Alaska  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the committee substitute for SB 36.

LOKI TOBIN, Staff

Senator Tom Begich  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the sectional analysis for SB 10 on behalf of the sponsor.

TERI COTHREN, Associate Vice President  
Workforce Development  
University of Alaska  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented University of Alaska Reskilling & Upskilling for Alaskans during the hearing on SB 10.

JOELLE HALL, President  
Alaska AFL-CIO  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 10.

PANU LUCIER, Director  
Alaska's System for Early Education Development (SEED)  
thread  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 10.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[9:03:12 AM](#)

**CHAIR ROGER HOLLAND** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stevens, Begich, Hughes, Micciche, and Chair Holland.

#### **SB 32-COLLEGE CREDIT FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

[9:03:47 AM](#)

**CHAIR HOLLAND** announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 32 "An Act establishing the Alaska middle college program for public school students; and relating to the powers of the University of Alaska."

He asked Senator Stevens if he had any additional comments on the bill.

[9:04:01 AM](#)

**SENATOR GARY STEVENS**, speaking as sponsor, said the committee has dealt with this issue a lot. It is simply a dual credit system and partnership between school districts and colleges. It

will be a great aid for school districts and for the University of Alaska.

[9:04:29 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND opened public testimony on SB 32.

[9:04:46 AM](#)

CHRIS REITAN, Superintendent, Craig City School District, Craig, Alaska, said he appreciates the intent of the bill to increase the access for high school students to the University of Alaska (UA) system. It allows families a greater choice of options and provides a way for students who might not consider UA to think about that possibility after high school. It is a great tool for all school districts to provide more choice and options for families and a strong individualized learning plan for each student. His only concern is with the following on page 3:

(e) An agreement entered into by a school district and the University of Alaska under (b) of this section must outline the manner in which costs associated with the program will be shared between the participating school district and the University of Alaska.

MR. REITAN expressed concern that without more specificity in that section, it might appear as an unfunded mandate, especially during the current economic climate, the pandemic, and the additional costs being borne by school districts. He is concerned that SB 32 requires additional responsibility without additional funding. He would appreciate more specifics about how the costs would be shared. He appreciates the intent of the bill. It spells out a nice path for more students to access the high quality programs at the UA system.

[9:07:05 AM](#)

NORM WOOTEN, Director of Advocacy, Association of Alaska School Boards, Juneau, Alaska, said that years ago when he was on the local school board, his school district created a dual credit program with the local branch of the University of Alaska Anchorage. This was groundbreaking, and it worked well for both institutions and especially for students. His own daughters received dual credit and college credit. However, Section 2 seems to require that all school districts with eligible students must participate in the middle college program. His organization is a strong proponent of local control. The association agrees with making this opportunity available to districts with a protocol in place. There are provisions in SB 32 that are appropriate and much appreciated, such as ensuring

readiness of students for college-level work and cost-sharing opportunities between the university and districts. However, he would encourage the legislators to respect the long-held belief in Alaska of local control in education.

CHAIR HOLLAND asked if anyone wanted to address the concerns raised.

9:09:29 AM

SENATOR BEGICH offered his understanding that a school district has to enter into an agreement. If school districts do not want to enter into one, even though there is a "must" clause, the agreement would say the school district is not going to participate, so it is not imposing a mandate. The mandate must be a mutual agreement between the two. As he understands the program in Mat-Su, those costs are generally borne as a combination of the Average Daily Membership and the university itself waiving fees. He recognizes the concern expressed by Superintendent Reitan and Norm Wooten, but it may be creating much ado about fairly little. This was discussed last year. The bill is written to make it a mutual agreement. There may be a misunderstanding. He asked for a clarification from the sponsor.

SENATOR STEVENS said the bill is intended to respect local school districts, so they can enter or not enter into the agreement. It is an opportunity but the school district may choose not to take advantage of it. Nothing in this bill requires anyone to enter into a program they don't wish to. He deferred further comment to Mr. Lamkin.

9:11:25 AM

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, said the conversation has been going on for many years. The bill is not intended to be prescriptive or to micromanage. It sets up a framework, and there shall be an agreement between the university and prospective school districts. The agreement could be that there will not be a middle college in that district.

9:12:00 AM

SENATOR HUGHES said that subsection (d) on page 3 says that every school district shall provide information about the program to students and parents of students. The bill is saying that the mutual agreement is that the district is not interested in providing the program, but the bill is also telling school districts they must provide information about the middle college program. She asked how those work together.

MR. LAMKIN said much of the onus of these programs is on the university to provide the information to districts that middle college opportunities are available. That information is not only to be known by the districts but also by parents so, locally, parents can negotiate with school districts to say that they want a middle college and work to develop one in their school districts.

SENATOR HUGHES said that to play the devil's advocate, if the district feels it cannot do it because it will be cost prohibitive in a small school that needs the student's ADM (Average Daily Membership) to keep the regular high school teachers, the district doesn't want an agreement; the district wants that the agreement is not to offer it. But the district is still instructed to tell parents that there is a middle college program out there, and the parents say they want their child to be in it, but there is no such agreement. There is a problem with this being congruent with the part that this is optional for districts. Perhaps the "shall" should be "may" if the bill gives districts the option.

CHAIR HOLLAND read page 2, line 20, "the university will make the program available to school districts in the state" and opined that if it is being made available, it cannot say "may" provide information. If it's being made available, information must be provided. That could be clarified a little, but Section b is the option for the district to enter a program or not and Section d is that if a district is in a program, it must provide information about it.

[9:14:52 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE said he is not sure that is how he reads it. He offered his belief that it says an agreement must be entered into. Line 22 on page 2 doesn't say that the agreement can be that the district is not going to participate. It says an agreement under this subsection must allow any student under (c) of this section to participate in the program. Page 3, line 2, doesn't say every district agreeing to enter into providing middle college services shall provide information about the program. He doesn't read it as voluntary. He doesn't see how there can be an agreement to not provide services because of the eligibility requirements on page 2, lines 22-24. He said he supports the program, but it should be voluntary for districts that may or may not be able to support the program. That is his only concern. He has heard that from several districts. He

wonders if there are opportunities to clarify for those districts that don't feel they can afford the program.

CHAIR HOLLAND said he still sees the university "shall" make the program available and the districts then enter into an agreement, but he will leave it up to the bill sponsor to decide if it needs to be reworded.

CHAIR HOLLAND returned to public testimony.

9:17:21 AM

SCOTT MACMANUS, Superintendent, Alaska Gateway School District, Tok, Alaska, said he reads the bill as a mandate. As a concept, he is in favor of what SB 32 does for many students, but there are important mechanics of the statute that will have unintended consequences for small rural school districts like his. He has several schools with one or two teachers. The savings that might be incurred in a larger district by reducing staff is not an option available for him. With some small changes, this could be good bill. He has promoted this in his school district for more than 20 years. A number of graduates in his district have received their associate of arts degrees shortly before they received their high school diplomas because the district worked with students and parents and supported the students with tutoring and internet access and financial support. His district created a great program that is in place today. The district is a good partner with the local university and sends many students to the university system to get one or two classes or certifications or degrees. It is hard for him to speak against this bill because Senator Stevens and Senator Micciche are big supporters of education, but as written this could end up hurting districts and some students if the district is required to let them do it. Alaska Gateway has a good counseling program in place for students. A large number of families do not have college in their backgrounds. The district is trying to change that, but it takes time and processes and trust between the schools and families. This may save some districts money, but it won't save his district money. In fact, 30 credits of undergraduate tuition will cost three times the allocation that the district provides to correspondence students. The allocation now is \$2,400. Families can spend that on college and sometimes the district supplements that. If every family in his district did that, he would have to close the correspondence program. He knows there is nuance in the language about entering into an agreement but the bill does seem to force districts to agree to something. He is a fan of the university system, but he cannot support the bill as written.

9:21:04 AM

SENATOR HUGHES said that she loves this concept. It has been highly successful in Mat-Su, but she understands how costs can factor in for small school districts. She is not sure that Senator Micciche made this point already about "An agreement under this subsection must allow any student eligible under (c) of this section to participate in the program." Even if the agreement is, which will be a strange agreement, to not enter into an agreement, in the scenario she had described in which an eligible student wanted to participate but the district was not entering into an agreement, this now says a student must be able to participate. As much as she loves the bill, she thinks the committee needs to work on the language. She asked if the sponsor had any thoughts on that. She would love it if students in small districts could do this, but there needs to be a way to pay for it. That may be beyond the bill at this point.

CHAIR HOLLAND asked Senator Stevens if he had any comment.

9:22:31 AM

SENATOR STEVENS said the focus of the bill is on the student and what is good for the student and how to help the student. Legislators have been talking about this a long time. It has never been their intention to harm school districts, to harm any who don't want to participate. He is surprised that this is coming up now. They have been talking about this for many meetings. It appears to be an organized effort to put a stake to the heart of this bill. That would be a mistake. That is all he will say at this point. He is anxious to hear other comments.

SENATOR BEGICH said that he shares the view of the sponsor. When legislators hear from people that a bill doesn't work, he wants to hear the suggestions for repairing it. This happens with bill after bill after bill. People will say they oppose a bill and don't offer a solution. He will offer a solution that he thinks addresses everything he heard today, including Senator Hughes' comments. On line 24, if those disagreements are sincere, the period would be replaced with a comma and say, "unless a district elects not to participate." That clears up any issue about participation. It still provides the opportunity for the student and maintains the requirement for the university to let every district know about the program and will resolve the issue about a mandate. Adding "unless a district elects not to participate" clarifies the issue of whether there is or isn't an agreement. The issue of the agreement becomes the negotiation between the district and the university, which is the intent of

the bill. That resolves the issue and it can be done quickly and rapidly without slowing down the passage of the bill. If it is the will of the chair, he would offer that as a conceptual amendment. If it is not the will of the chair, he will not offer the amendment.

CHAIR HOLLAND replied that there is more public testimony and he jotted those notes down.

[9:25:17 AM](#)

At ease

[9:27:55 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting and continued public testimony.

[9:28:15 AM](#)

PATRICK MAYER, Superintendent, Aleutians East Borough School District, Sandpoint, Alaska, said he believes everyone supports increased opportunities for students as they exit the K-12 school system. Aleutians East provides opportunities for students to take part in college courses through the University of Alaska Anchorage within its capability to do so. The capacity to provide online content is limited in many rural areas of Alaska. This is definitely true in the Aleutians. To make this mandatory would be difficult because Aleutians East does not have the bandwidth to support such a program. It is also a financial challenge for the district. There has been no Base Student Allocation adjustment for seven years. This will further erode the capacity for his district to provide existing programs. The middle college concept should be voluntary not mandatory. Colleagues in larger districts who participated in middle colleges have done so voluntarily. Smaller districts have keenly watched that and increased their opportunities for students to take college classes within their capability to do so. Smaller school districts would have difficulty downsizing to accommodate this change. It is a matter of scale. Even if his district had the bandwidth, if it had to remove students from current course offerings it would be challenging. This is not as much an issue in larger districts because it is a matter of scale. He asked the committee to consider advancing the bill with an opt-in provision.

[9:31:57 AM](#)

LISA PARADY, Ph.D., Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators, Juneau, Alaska, said that Senator Stevens is acknowledged as the champion of all students and public

education. The committee has heard from Norm Wooten and several members of the council. The council does support the concept of providing opportunity for all high school students to enroll in college courses, but there is potential added expense for some school districts. Maybe more clarity is needed about the agreements between the university and districts. A "may" vs. a "shall" as Senator Begich suggested would be an excellent clarification.

9:33:14 AM

DR. PARADY said her members support choice and this increased opportunity for all students and support SB 32 with the exception of it being required of all districts. It could be made voluntary. Middle colleges are working so well in the districts that have chosen to go in this direction and it should operate the same in other districts. Perhaps, as Senator Hughes, Senator Micciche, and Senator Begich suggested, the bill does "shall or may." Last year the committee talked about flipping this so the university waived costs, making it cost neutral. Perhaps amending the bill should be considered to include full funding for districts who wish to participate a middle college program, some additional work about how to make this work for all districts who are not similarly situated. It is a great program. Her members support this increased opportunity available to all students. In districts where it has been organically, like Anchorage, Mat-Su, Fairbanks, and Kodiak, it has been hugely successful. Those opportunities should be available in all districts but in a way that is cost neutral.

For example, if six kids in Chevak want to enroll in middle college, Chevak could not adjust down its personnel to meet the tuition expense to make it cost neutral. Chevak would likely need to hire an aide to work with the students as they work online, assuming they have the bandwidth or connectivity to do that. A three-credit lower division class cost \$700 plus. If six kids in Chevak took a class, it would be over \$4,000, and the cost of an aide to supervise. It is a real cost and not cost neutral. That is what she is hearing from members. There is total support for the concept and this bill, but it should be reworked so it is an opt-in or not required.

9:36:29 AM

SENATOR BEGICH said he did not suggest that the word "shall" be replaced with "may." He suggested that the intent, which is on the record, be clarified, which is that an agreement could be to not enter into an agreement. That is all he is suggesting. He does not think the bill imposes a burden on a district as

districts have the right to refuse to participate. He is confused because this is the first opposition he has heard about this bill.

[9:37:21 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE said he too does not like the way that process has gone. He supports this program wholeheartedly, and is a cosponsor. He is trying to help the sponsor get the bill across the finish line in a way that doesn't drive additional costs for some districts. He told Dr. Parady that it would be helpful to understand what those districts look like. Perhaps, without complicating the bill dramatically, either the committee makes it an opt-in for some or have another way to move this forward where the committee understands the kind of districts that potentially would be negatively impacted. He doesn't understand at what size it has a potential negative impact. He wants to understand that better. Dr. Parady said six kids in Chevak. That is an extreme. And Dr. Bishop will speak highly of the program in a place that has tens of thousands of students. There is probably somewhere in between where there is a line. He asked if she could help with that. If not during this meeting, they will need to know that.

DR. PARADY responded that it is a matter of scale. There is a point where it would add additional costs. She could ask members for a point of clarification. The example she gave was an extreme, but she wanted to give an example of what some testifiers might have been speaking to. As a point of clarification, when she referred to Senator Begich, she was referring to the sentence he offered, which would fully clarify the bill. She will get that information to Senator Micciche.

CHAIR HOLLAND called on Dr. Bishop

[9:40:19 AM](#)

DEENA BISHOP, Ph.D., Superintendent, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, said SB 32 is an important bill. Alaska has relied on volunteerism for much too long, while at the same time its children are the lowest reading performers in the country and according to the January 2021 Alaska Performance Scholarship report, the lowest college-going, career and technical education apprenticeship-going students as well. It is time to change this trajectory with partnerships, not only among different sectors at different universities, or K-12 and universities, but it is time that school districts learn to work together to make this come to fruition. "We are very smart people who can figure out very intricate, complex problems," she said.

[9:41:38 AM](#)

DR. BISHOP said if school districts are charged, as this bill states, to figure out how all the children in Alaska could possibly be offered a dual-credit program, she guarantees that there are smart superintendents who can get together and figure this out. They can have cooperatives. She is working with the Lower Yukon and a Lower Yukon student is attending [the Anchorage School District] Alaska Middle College. Lower Yukon has offered a pathway for other kids in rural Alaska to join. She said she too regrets the 11th hour pushback by educators on this and many other important bills that can change what is happening with education in the state.

DR. BISHOP said that the University of Alaska system has made it very affordable for school districts to have dual credit. If a child goes individually, the child may pay full price for tuition, but she wants to share that universities have offered MOUs (memorandum of understanding) to allow the jobs to be shared. The advising doesn't happen on the university side, so her district gets a break on the tuition. A lot of the services included in tuition are not provided because a child is not on site for dual credit online, so the university creates a lower payment plan. The university has been very accommodating to these kids.

DR. BISHOP offered her belief that the state can do this. She worked in Mat-Su and Anchorage and it is true they have economy of scale, but it was a choice. They went without other things that didn't work for children to be able to offer this to kids. They are not successful as a K-12 institution if they do not prepare kids for life afterwards. That is to be life, college-and-career ready. This bill ensures that kids can have that opportunity. She promises this group that she will work her hardest to figure out how to make this work in all districts and offer whatever they can to partner in the cost. This is important to Alaskan children.

[9:44:43 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES noted that when Dr. Bishop was in Mat-Su, she was able to work out the cost with the smaller district. She asked if she has a sense that larger districts may be able to do that for all the smaller districts so that it would not be cost prohibitive.

DR. BISHOP replied absolutely. Anchorage is the one, the cost center for the BSA. Per student Anchorage receives a little over \$10,000 with the adjusted ADM (Average Daily Membership). The

school district that Anchorage works with receives over \$20,000 per child. That district spends only a small portion of that with the Anchorage School District flowing through the university. What that small school district cannot offer for supports, wraparound services, advising, etc., Anchorage has taken on that and the university does its part by offering courses. She believes all the different hubs that have economy of scale can help out partner districts. It is true that may only have one or two students interested, but they are valued kids in Alaska who should also have that opportunity.

9:46:47 AM

PAUL LAYER, Vice President, Academics, Students, and Research, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska, said that as he testified last week, the university supports dual enrollment for students. The university has over 30 MOUs with school districts, large and small, to offer many types of middle college programs. Some are face-to-face intensive, such as with the Anchorage, Mat-Su, and Fairbanks school districts. Some are more online or virtual, and more of a partnership with the district. As the university has entered voluntary agreements with districts, the university has looked at the cost models to look at what works for the districts and the students in particular. There is not one model that works for each school district. The university respects that and respects the goal, which is access for students and to prepare students for university and for careers. That has been the focus on the university. It is willing to work with school districts. It has been voluntary to date. The university wants to expand that option to all students, however that can be done. In some dual-enrollment options the district teacher who meet the credentialing criteria teaches the class. The most important thing is whether students achieve university-level competency in subjects. Every MOU will look different. The focus is to provide access to students wherever they are.

9:49:44 AM

SENATOR HUGHES said if she were still in a small district, she would want her children to have access to this opportunity. She asked if he agrees with Dr. Bishop who is confident that partnerships could be worked out so that it would not be cost prohibitive. She also asked if the university is committed to working out arrangements and district partnerships so that every high school student in the state who wants to participate could.

DR. LAYER answered absolutely. Alaska Advantage, the online middle college program, is working with Chevak on how that might be achieved. The university is ultimately looking at reaching

out to all districts to ask how it might provide that access, whether districts are large or small and whether the university needs to work out partnerships between large and small districts. The university is committed to making this work.

[9:52:03 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND closed public testimony on SB 32.

[9:52:08 AM](#)

At ease

[9:54:08 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting and asked if there were any further comments.

SENATOR MICCICHE said he believes in this program and that every student deserves the opportunity to jump start their lives with middle college. If there are issues with this bill, it has other committees to go through. In light of the fact that any issues were brought to the committee at the 11th hour and the committee at this point does not know if any adjustment is needed, the reality is they all support the program and will let it go through the process.

[9:55:16 AM](#)

SENATOR MICCICHE moved to report SB 32, work order 32-LS0307\A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

CHAIR HOLLAND found no objection, SB 32 was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[9:55:26 AM](#)

At ease

### **SB 36-U OF A REGENTS REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

[9:58:12 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 36 "An Act relating to reporting requirements of the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska."

He asked for a motion to adopt the committee substitute.

[9:58:28 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to adopt the work draft committee substitute (CS) for SB 36, work order 32-LS0312\B, as the working document.

[9:58:42 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND objected for purposes of discussion.

[9:58:51 AM](#)

ED KING, Staff, Senator Roger Holland, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, said the CS changes the reporting requirement for the Board of Regents from twice a year to once every other year. Section 2 has the three changes where "biennial" replaces "semiannual." There are also three additional conforming changes.

[9:59:48 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND removed his objection. There being no further objection, version B was before the committee.

[10:00:04 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said this is a great change and amendment. It makes sense. It aligns this reporting with existing reporting requirements, such as for teacher preparation. The reason for this, of course, is that everyone was broadsided with the loss of accreditation for the School of Education in Anchorage. The legislature needs to be more aware of what is going on with the university. He hopes the state will never again face the possibility of a loss of accreditation, but it is always possible. Even though it is every two years, it is good that the legislature has this report from the Board of Regents.

[10:00:48 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND opened public testimony on SB 36.

[10:01:13 AM](#)

PAUL LAYER, Vice President, Academics, Students, and Research, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska, thanked Senator Stevens and staff for changing the timeline for reporting. The board does receive annual reports on accreditation that are a matter of public record. The university feels that reporting to the legislature on a [biennial] basis will fit in with the university's accreditation timeline.

[10:02:11 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked if the annual reports include the status of accreditation.

[10:02:29 AM](#)

DR. LAYER replied yes. The university reports on institutional and individual, specialized program accreditations. As a result of the accreditation issues with education, the board is asking for more information in those reports.

SENATOR HUGHES said that is good to hear.

[10:03:10 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND closed public testimony on SB 36, and asked the will of the committee.

[10:03:27 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to report the work draft CS for SB 36, work order 32-LS0312\B, from the committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

CHAIR HOLLAND found no objection, and CSSB 36(EDC) was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[10:03:50 AM](#)

At ease

**SB 10-FREE/REDUCED TUITION FOR ESSENTIAL WORKER**

[10:05:50 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 10 "An Act establishing a grant program to provide to essential workers the tuition and fees to attend a state-supported postsecondary educational institution."

He stated his intent to hear the bill, take public testimony, and hold the bill in committee for further review. He called on Senator Begich and staff to introduce the bill.

[10:06:10 AM](#)

SENATOR TOM BEGICH, speaking as sponsor of SB 10, explained that bill is a thank you to essential workers for the work they did the past year. Whether they delivered groceries, took care of young children, picked people up from the airport, cleaned offices, or handled the mail, essential workers made the ultimate sacrifice, sometimes at great risk to themselves and their loved ones. A recent study published by the Occupational Environmental Medicine Journal reported that over 20 percent of grocery store employees tested positive for COVID-19. Of that 20 percent, more than 95 percent reported getting it from contact through their jobs. That is precisely why the bill is before the

committee. The bill, besides being good policy, is a thank you to those workers, those workers who put their lives on the line for each person. During COVID everyone fell behind. As more is learned about the road ahead, it is clear the country is in a wildly uneven recovery. SB 10 is about giving those essential workers a hand up after the dust settles.

SENATOR BEGICH reminded the members who heard the bill in the Labor and Commerce hearing that the Department of Labor displayed a graphic that showed that a year later, the state is still 25 percent down in employing the lowest income labor force, while the labor market for the upper end went up 1 percent a year later. The department data shows that higher education attainment equates to higher weekly earnings. A recent University of Alaska workforce report states that median income earnings for those with just a high school diploma is about \$35,000 in Alaska while those with bachelor's degree earn on average \$57,000 a year. Education matters. The bill is a pathway to education for those who choose it to take it. The same report states that 96.3 percent of working graduates are Alaska residents. Going to school in Alaska keeps people in Alaska. By providing path for essential workers to earn a postsecondary education in Alaska, the state will stop the attrition of Alaska's future.

[10:08:58 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said that as stated in Labor and Commerce, his office has some changes to work on in committee substitute to reflect the intent of bill. It will include all of the essential workers identified in the handout in the committee packet called Alaska's Essential Services and Critical Workforce Infrastructure. That came from a lot of commentary to his office. It includes those who worked in the front lines for the nonprofit sector, like Bean's Café workers and postal workers. This all came up in testimony. After a review of the legislation with the executive director of the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, his office recognized that although the bill meant to permit attendance at any state-supported postsecondary institution for a student who has not yet received an undergraduate degree, some phrasing must be fixed. It is minor, but it clarifies that intent. He has had good discussion about the program start and end dates, which now are tied to the expiration of the federal emergency declaration. He plans to provide an amendment that permits interested parties to apply for consideration until the end of this year and then repeal the entire program by 2025, giving people four years to actively participate in it. The state of Michigan has enacted this

program. Michigan used CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act funding to enact it. With the \$1.1 billion coming to the state, he is certain that the Finance Committees will be able to redirect some of that resource. His fiscal note shows that it will not be over \$10 million for the entire period of the grants program.

[10:10:59 AM](#)

LOKI TOBIN, Staff, Senator Tom Begich, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the sectional analysis for SB 10. She noted that Senator Begich will offer an amendment to Section 1 relating to the list of occupations.

*Section 1.*

Establishes an Essential Worker Grant Program as new uncodified law of the State of Alaska.

Directs the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education to establish an undergraduate tuition grant program for essential workers employed at the start of or during the declared federal public health emergency. This section also includes a comprehensive listing of occupations that qualify as essential for the purpose of this grant program.

Provides stipulations for qualifying essential workers, including employment status, postsecondary enrollment status, residency requirement, high school or equivalency completion requirement, grade point minimum, completion of federal aid application, and post-secondary credit hour limitations.

Includes grant program eligibility requirements, including grade point minimum, program progression, and enrollment status.

Directs the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education to establish policies and procedures for application and admission to the program, including establishing evaluation process of program efficacy.

*Section 2.*

Establishes an Essential Worker Grant Program Report as new uncodified law of the State of Alaska. Directs the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education to submit the report of program efficacy to the Alaska State Legislature on or before December 31st.

Section 3. Repeals Section 1 on the date of expiration or determination of the declaration of a federal public health emergency.

MS. TOBIN noted that as mentioned by the sponsor, an amendment to Section is forthcoming.

Section 4. Sets a repeal date of January 1, 2025 for Section 2 of this Act.

CHAIR HOLLAND called on invited testimony.

[10:13:56 AM](#)

TERI COTHREN, Associate Vice President for Workforce Development, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska, said she would present Reskilling and Upskilling for Alaskans. With legislation such as SB 10, the university can train more Alaskans and support Alaska's economic recovery. She said she will explain how training Alaska's workforce is a critical part of the university's mission.

MS. COTHREN described Alaska's system of higher education on slide 2.

MS. COTHREN presented slide 3, UA's Critical Workforce Mission:

- Alaska's most comprehensive provider of workforce training
  - UA offers more than 200 programs in workforce development
  - Non-credit industry recognized certifications, endorsements, certificates
  - Associate Degrees
  - Bachelor, Masters and Doctorate Degrees
- Programs in high-demand industries needed for Alaska's economic growth

MS. COTHREN presented slide 4, Value of Postsecondary Education. The median earnings data is from analysis by the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and make abundantly clear the economic value of training and education. The data shows that more education and training correlate strongly with lower unemployment rates and this was highlighted during the pandemic:

- Median earnings jump from:
  - \$35,328 for high school graduates
  - \$44,619 for Alaskans with an associate degree

- o \$57,708 for those with a bachelor's degree
- o \$77,402 for holders of graduate or professional degrees
- Lower unemployment rates
- Provide skills required for new and advancing careers

[10:17:02 AM](#)

MS. COTHREN displayed slide 5, UA Workforce Reports - Industries Highlighted. Through a recent project, the university strengthened its partnership with Research and Analysis at the Department of Labor to demonstrate graduate outcomes across key Alaska industries that resulted in the development of nine workforce reports.

MS. COTHREN displayed slide 6, UA Workforce Reports, which showed an example of the data in one report, including average wages of graduates and hiring trends of the industry being featured.

[10:18:25 AM](#)

At ease

[10:18:32 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting and suspended Ms. Cothren's presentation because of audio technical difficulties.

[10:19:11 AM](#)

JOELLE HALL, President, Alaska AFL-CIO, Anchorage, Alaska, stated that her organization represents 60,000 workers in a variety of fields. Many, such as first responders, hospital and state employees, and grocery store workers, have worked under difficult conditions during the pandemic. Her organization represents many frontline workers, but many do not benefit from collective bargaining agreements, such as childcare workers, delivery drivers, personal care attendants, to name a few. Much was learned during the pandemic. She hopes that one thing sticks out in people's collective hearts and memories. Without childcare and grocery store workers, everyone is in deep trouble. The pandemic resulted in huge job losses. As a community, Alaska needs to do everything it can to get Alaskans back to work. One way to make a big difference is job training. Providing training and opportunities to a better way of life for families is the cornerstone of the work that the labor movement does. A market economy is enhanced when workers have easy access to affordable training. This bill will reward many who have given so much with a gift that helps them and their families. As is noted in the sponsor statement, better trained workers also

help employers, so this bill is a win-win for workers and their current and future employers. This is a good idea that will help so many who have given so much. AFL-CIO is in full support of this bill. She had had conversations with Senator Begich about apprenticeships. The apprenticeship systems that AFL-CIO is involved with are already free to the student, so Alaska's union apprenticeships are free of charge, but AFL-CIO would look forward to expanding those training opportunities. In order to do that, its supply-and-demand system is based on work. If there are infrastructure bills or geobond bills, AFL-CIO stands ready to expand up its training modules and training systems in the construction industry to rapidly respond to the free market demand for those workers. If the legislature invests in geobonds or infrastructure, that allows an uptake of these workers into things like the apprenticeship system, whether they are union or nonunion, and putting more workers into the construction workforce, which in Alaska is considered a graying workforce and would allow Alaska to keep its workers here. She described SB 10 as a great bill.

[10:22:16 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND called on Teri Cothren to continue her presentation.

MS. COTHREN explained that slide 6 on workforce reports highlights graduate outcomes.

MS. COTHREN presented a graph on slide 7, Summary of First-Year Employment. The graph shows industries where first-year graduates are employed. Health care is projected to grow at twice the rate of the rest of the economy overall and total 54,000 jobs by 2028, so it is not a surprise that nearly 24 percent of graduates work in the health care industry. Graduates are in educational services, mining and gas, as well as transportation and construction industries.

MS. COTHREN displayed a graph on slide 8, Average Wages of UA Graduates, and said that Alaska has some of the best employment data in the country. [Audio connection was lost.]

[10:25:02 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH said that he had no idea how detailed the data is until Ms. Cothren presented data to his office. That data has driven his desire to see the bill move. When the state can get folks into these jobs, they become fully functioning participants in the state's system. That is what her presentation is underscoring, how many of these Alaskans

improved their income level and contribution to the state and become productive citizens. That is a critical component of the presentation.

[10:25:58 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said she supports people furthering their education to lift themselves up into a better position. She and her husband did that years ago. She said her problem with the bill is that people were unemployed in the state who were not in the category of essential worker do not qualify because they were able to continue working and earn a wage, but many had to close small business and could not go to work and got hit hard.

SENATOR BEGICH responded that one of the things about the bill is that it does try to provide opportunity for people who were on the front lines and may have lost their jobs because of the pandemic. That is the intent in the amendment, to cover those workers she described. If people were unfortunate enough to lose their jobs during that time period, they would potentially be eligible for the grants program. That is part of the plan. They would have qualified as an essential worker before losing their job.

SENATOR HUGHES offered her understanding that some of the jobs that were lost do not meet the definition for essential worker so they would not qualify. She asked if she misunderstands that.

SENATOR BEGICH answered that he is not sure. He can look into that and find an answer that satisfies both her and himself.

CHAIR HOLLAND shared that is also his concern. He thought essential workers worked through the pandemic. His concern is that those are people who didn't miss a paycheck, but there are people who shut down businesses.

[10:28:40 AM](#)

At ease

[10:28:53 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND reconvened the meeting and opened public testimony on SB 10.

[10:29:11 AM](#)

PANU LUCIER, Director, Alaska's System for Early Education Development (SEED), thread, Anchorage, Alaska, said that SEED is Alaska's statewide professional development system in early childhood. In Alaska and across the nation early childhood

teachers have remained in the lower income bracket. In Alaska the median hourly wage for childcare workers is \$13.21 Many early childhood educators have families of their own and struggle to make ends meet and do not have extra money for training or higher education. Many work two jobs to make ends meet. The COVID pandemic shed light on how essential childcare is for working families. Alaska's early educators have been on the frontlines as essential workers throughout the pandemic. SB 10 would provide much needed assistance.

[10:30:52 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND asked Teri Cothren to continue her presentation.

MS. COTHREN said that to speak to the final two slides, starting with slide 8, the state has rich employment data, thanks to the research from the Department of Labor and Workforce Development. The graph on slide 8 of UA wage outcomes shows that more education and training correlate strongly with more earning potential. The average first-year wages of these graduates are more than \$50,000 and the fifth-year wages exceed the average Alaska wage by nearly \$10,000.

MS. COTHREN displayed the graph on slide 9, which shows that 96 percent of working graduates are Alaska residents. The university supports SB 10 to help remove a potential barrier for essential workers.

SENATOR BEGICH said that on page 2, line 1, of the bill does say was permanently or temporarily laid off as one of the conditions.

[10:34:11 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND closed public testimony and held SB 10 in committee.

[10:34:24 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Holland adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 10:34 a.m.