

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE**

May 1, 2024

5:06 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Jesse Sumner, Chair  
Representative Justin Ruffridge, Vice Chair  
Representative Mike Prax  
Representative Stanley Wright  
Representative Ashley Carrick  
Representative Zack Fields

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Dan Saddler

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

Board of Barbers and Hairdressers

Tenaya Miramontes - Juneau  
Wendy Palin - Palmer

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Alaska Labor Relations Agency

Justin Mack - Anchorage  
Jennifer Yuhas - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers

Jenny Buswell - Palmer  
Mae Sprague - Wasilla

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Regulatory Commission of Alaska

John Espindola - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Alaska Workers' Compensation Board

Pamela Cline - Wasilla  
John Corbett - Fairbanks  
Bronson Frye - Anchorage  
Debbie White - Juneau  
Steven Heidemann - Anchorage  
Brian Zematis - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

the Alaska State Board of Public Accountancy

Mark Diehl - Palmer

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

State Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers, and Land Surveyors

Paul Baril - Anchorage  
John Barry - Gustavus  
Jeffrey Garness - Anchorage  
Colin Maynard - Anchorage  
Bradford Rinckey - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Board of Pharmacy

Carla Herbert - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

Workers' Compensation Appeals Commission

Nancy Shaw - Anchorage  
Amy Steele - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

HOUSE BILL NO. 360

"An Act establishing the Home Care Employment Standards Advisory Board; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSHB 360 (L&C) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 239

"An Act relating to the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority; and relating to workforce housing development projects."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 27

Supporting trade policies for the United States that hold China, Russia, and other countries accountable, reward leadership in clean production standards, reward superior environmental performance, support economic development, and support the rebuilding of supply chains in the United States.

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 360

SHORT TITLE: HOME CARE EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS ADV BOARD

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) PRAX

02/20/24	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/20/24	(H)	L&C
05/01/24	(H)	L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124

BILL: SB 239

SHORT TITLE: AIDEA WORKFORCE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) DUNBAR

02/19/24	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/19/24	(S)	L&C, FIN
02/21/24	(S)	FIN REFERRAL REMOVED
03/27/24	(S)	L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/27/24	(S)	Heard & Held
03/27/24	(S)	MINUTE(L&C)
04/12/24	(S)	L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
04/12/24	(S)	Moved SB 239 Out of Committee
04/12/24	(S)	MINUTE(L&C)
04/15/24	(S)	L&C RPT 2DP 2NR
04/15/24	(S)	NR: BJORKMAN, MERRICK
04/15/24	(S)	DP: GRAY-JACKSON, DUNBAR
04/22/24	(S)	TRANSMITTED TO (H)
04/22/24	(S)	VERSION: SB 239

04/24/24 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
04/24/24 (H) L&C  
04/29/24 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124  
04/29/24 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --  
05/01/24 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JOHN ESPINDOLA, Appointee, Commissioner  
Regulatory Commission of Alaska  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

RILEY NYE, Staff  
Representative Mike Prax  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 360, on behalf of Representative Prax, prime sponsor.

ALEXIS RODICH, Research and Policy  
SEIU775  
Washington D.C.

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the hearing on HB 360.

VANESSA LISTON-CUNNINGHAM  
representing self  
Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony on HB 360.

TONDA LUNDIN, representing self  
Big Lake, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony in support of HB 360.

EDNA BEEBE, representing self  
Eek, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony in support of HB 360.

JAMES HOLZENBERG, Staff  
Senator Forrest Dunbar  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented SB 239 on behalf of Senator Dunbar, prime sponsor.

MARK DAVIS, Special Counsel  
Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority  
Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development (DCCED)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Responded to questions during the hearing on SB 239.

BRANDON BREFCZYNSKI, Deputy Director  
Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority  
Redmond, Washington

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the hearing on HB 360.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[5:06:17 PM](#)

**CHAIR JESSE SUMNER** called the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 5:06 p.m. Representatives Wright, Carrick, Fields, and Sumner were present at the call to order. Representatives Prax, Ruffridge arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**CONFIRMATION HEARING(S):**  
**Regulatory Commission of Alaska**  
**Occupational Safety and Health Review Board**  
**Alaska State Board of Public Accountancy**  
**State Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers, and Landy**  
**Surveyors**  
**Board of Barbers and Hairdressers**  
**Alaska Labor Relations Agency**  
**Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers**  
**Workers' Compensation Appeals Commission**  
**Alaska Workers' Compensation Board**  
**Board of Pharmacy**

[5:07:02 PM](#)

CHAIR SUMNER announced that the first order of business would be the confirmation hearings for the governor's appointees to various boards and commissions.

[5:07:31 PM](#)

JOHN ESPINDOLA, Appointee, Commissioner, Regulatory Commission of Alaska, testified as appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska. He detailed his personal and professional background and spoke to his experience on the board, as well as with the Dunleavy Administration. He said his vision involves developing diverse energy resources.

[5:14:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked for Commissioner Espindola's thoughts on the role of the RCA in helping to control the cost of energy bills for residents of the Railbelt.

MR. ESPINDOLA stated that the RCA has a unique opportunity to be front and center in crafting Alaska's energy landscape over the next 50 years. He said many measures were introduced this session that would grant the commission the flexibility to make determinations on rates.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS referenced Section 1 of SB 257 and asked Commissioner Espindola to speak to that pending legislation, as well as his qualifying contributions and attributes.

MR. ESPINDOLA said he meets the qualification requirements of AS 42.04.020 with over 10 years of executive management experience in business administration and over 5 years of experience in public administration on top of 18 years of experience serving on various boards and commissions.

[5:16:24 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WRIGHT shared that he had worked with the appointee and commended his work.

[5:17:01 PM](#)

CHAIR SUMNER opened public testimony on the appointment of Commissioner Espindola. After ascertaining that no one wished to testify, he closed public testimony.

[5:17:55 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 5:17 p.m.

[5:17:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE moved to advance the confirmations of Tenaya Miramontes and Wendy Palin to the Board of Barbers and Hairdressers; Justin Mack and Jennifer Yuhas to the Alaska Labor Relations Agency; Jenny Buswell and Mae Sprague to the Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers; John Espindola to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska; Pamela Cline, John Corbett, Bronson Frye, Debbie White, Steven Heidemann, and Brian Zematis to the Alaska Workers' Compensation Board; Mark Diehl to the Alaska State Board of Public Accountancy; Paul Baril, John Barry, Jeffrey Garness, Colin Maynard, and Bradford Rinckey to the State Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers, and Land Surveyors; Carla Herbert to the Board of Pharmacy; and Nancy Shaw and Amy Steele to the Workers' Compensation Appeals Commission for consideration in the joint session of the House and Senate. He reminded members that signing the reports regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects individual members' approval or disapproval of the appointees, and that the nominations are merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection. There being no objection, the confirmations were advanced.

[recording segment repaired using LIO recording]

[5:20:04 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 5:20 p.m.

[Chair Sumner passed the gavel to Vice Chair Ruffridge.]

**HB 360-HOME CARE EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS ADV BOARD**

[5:21:58 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR RUFFRIDGE announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 360, "An Act establishing the Home Care Employment Standards Advisory Board; and providing for an effective date."

[5:22:17 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX, as prime sponsor, presented HB 360. He shared the sponsor statement for HB 360 [included in committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Seniors are the fastest growing demographic in the state of Alaska<sup>1</sup> and are living longer lives. The state's 85+ population is expected to increase by 500%

between 2022 and 2050, of which, 1/3 will experience Alzheimer's and Related Dementia. Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development predicts home care, a part of Alaska's continuum of care services to the aging and people with disabilities, to be one of the fastest growing and most in demand occupations in the state. However, the potential provider workforce demographic, those age 18 to 64, is in decline. Furthermore, low wages and lack of benefits force many caregivers out of the profession and make recruitment and retention increasingly more difficult for agencies providing in-home care services.

We need to create strong home care infrastructure in Alaska which will expand access to quality, affordable home and community-based care for seniors and people with disabilities, keep people in their homes and out of costly facilities, and bolster the creation of jobs. HB 360 helps accomplish this by establishing a Home Care Employment Standards Advisory Board that will investigate, advise, and develop recommendations on Medicaid rates and other policies to improve the wages, working conditions, and recruitment and retention of direct care workers.

[5:25:13 PM](#)

RILEY NYE, Staff, Representative Mike Prax, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Prax, prime sponsor, offered to read the sectional analysis.

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE advised that Mr. Nye forego the sectional.

[5:25:55 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked how other states with similar structures have improved working conditions.

[5:26:24 PM](#)

ALEXIS RODICH, Research and Policy, SEIU775, confirmed that similar boards exist in Nevada and Washington. The scope of those boards are slightly different; however, they bring together a similar group of stakeholders who advise and make recommendations based on their understanding of the needs of the workforce.

[5:27:22 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 5:27 p.m. to 5:29 p.m.

[Vice Chair Ruffridge returned the gavel to Chair Sumner.]

[5:29:07 PM](#)

VANESSA LISTON-CUNNINGHAM, representing self, gave invited testimony on HB 360. She shared a personal anecdote and discussed how the state cares for people with disabilities. She opined on the lack of agency accountability with regard to the use of disability funds. She asked members to consider giving caregivers a voice and recognition and urged them to consider HB 360.

[5:32:13 PM](#)

TONDA LUNDIN, representing self, gave invited testimony in support of HB 360. She emphasized her passion for caregiving and stressed that, at some point in every Alaskan's life, they will need quality care. She opined that the time for change is now, and that a foundation of fair pay, healthcare benefits, and quality providers should be laid for future Alaskans. She said the bill would give Alaskan caregivers a voice in the process and hold companies accountable by ensuring that allotted funds go directly to caregivers.

[5:34:44 PM](#)

EDNA BEEBE, representing self, gave invited testimony in support of HB 360. She described elements of a subsistence lifestyle in Eek and discussed the high cost of living in rural Alaska. She described her experience as a caregiver and advocated for receiving more hours and higher pay with benefits. She opined that caregivers should have a say in the process of funding distribution and stated her support for HB 360.

[5:38:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS opined that HB 360 would be a good vehicle for ensuring that caregivers are directly receiving the funding. He assured testifiers that legislators are working on the issue; however, there are not adequate statutory guidelines in place yet.

CHAIR SUMNER said the bill would be held over.

[5:39:51 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 5:39 p.m. to 5:41 p.m.

[5:41:49 PM](#)

CHAIR SUMNER clarified that the committee would continue the hearing on HB 360.

[5:41:54 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK moved to adopt Conceptual Amendment 1 to HB 360.

CHAIR SUMNER objected for purposes of discussion.

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK stated that Conceptual Amendment 1 would change the number of positions on the board from 11 to 9, thereby removing one member representing a personal care agency and one member representing a personal care assistant.

CHAIR SUMNER removed his objection. There being no further objection, Conceptual Amendment 1 was adopted.

[5:42:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE moved to report HB 360, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes, and to authorize Legislative Legal Services to make any necessary technical or conforming changes.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX objected. He noted that the committee had not held public testimony on HB 360.

[5:43:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS responded that public testimony is advisable, though not required, and he commented on the short timeframe until the end of session and the value of the proposed legislation.

[5:44:00 PM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Wright, Carrick, Fields, Prax, and Sumner voted in favor of the motion to report

HB 360, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. Representatives Ruffridge voted against it. Therefore, CSHB 360(L&C) was reported out of the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee by a vote of 5-1.

**SB 239-AIDEA WORKFORCE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT**

[5:44:47 PM](#)

CHAIR SUMNER announced that the final order of business would be SENATE BILL NO. 239, "An Act relating to the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority; and relating to workforce housing development projects."

[5:45:09 PM](#)

JAMES HOLZENBERG, Staff, Senator Forrest Dunbar, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Senator Dunbar, prime sponsor, read the sponsor statement for SB 239 [included in committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Alaska is experiencing a housing crisis. Our state's housing stock is overcrowded, dilapidated, and energy inefficient. There has been an ongoing, unprecedented exodus of working-age people that has severely limited our economy's recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. Alaska needs to use every tool at its disposal to help grow our workforce and give our most talented and experienced people a reason to stay in-state to work and raise a family. The Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority happens to be well-positioned to use their loan program to fund the construction of workforce housing to help alleviate the housing crisis.

SB 239 adds a new objective to AIDEA's mission statement, allowing the corporation to use their loan program for the construction of new workforce housing facilities containing five or more dwelling units. The legislation adds a definition of "workforce housing" based on the Department of Housing and Urban Development's working definition, which calculates affordability based on the average median income of an area.

SB 239 is a concrete step we can take to address our housing shortage. With Alaska facing workforce development challenges and recruitment and retention issues across every sector, we can no longer afford inaction on this issue. I urge your support for SB 239 so we can begin developing new housing options to incentivize people to stay and work in Alaska, in line with AIDEA's mission.

[5:47:51 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS offered his understanding that the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) is allowed to make housing. Asked what the difference is.

[5:48:26 PM](#)

MARK DAVIS, Special Counsel, Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority, Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development (DCCED), answered that AIDEA can give commercial real estate, which should encompass apartments; however, there is no express statement to that effect in statute. The proposed bill would be useful to AIDEA because it would provide "direct legal authorization for this type of activity."

[5:49:09 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked someone to elaborate why AIDEA, which is involved in industry, is involved, when the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) addresses housing.

MR. DAVIS explained that while AHFC focuses on low-income housing and Section 8 HUD housing and what AIDEA does is industrial, AIDEA also does commercial real estate. In response to a follow-up question, he said AIDEA does not compete against banks; institutions must bring in the loan while AIDEA makes up the rest of the loan.

[5:52:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS highlighted the struggle to find housing at Greens Creek. He relayed the definition of workforce housing in Section 5 and expressed concern that it would significantly constrain workforce housing. He asked whether Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority or the bill sponsor would be open to changing the definition to include anything beyond low-income housing.

[5:54:01 PM](#)

BRANDON BREFCZYNSKI, Deputy Director, Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority, said more flexibility would expand AIDEA's ability to take advantage of this authority.

[5:54:45 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX shared his understanding that AHFC already has a loan program for residential housing.

MR. DAVIS confirmed that AHFC offers mortgages for first time home buyers; however, the bill is focused on workforce development housing where workers have too high of an income to qualify for federal programs, but not enough income to afford housing. These housing projects are designed to fill the gap, he said.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether a federal program is available for workforce development housing specifically.

MR. DAVIS said he is unaware of a federal program that would cover this, but several states have programs that use these federal guidelines as qualifications to work with their economic development authority, like AIDEA, to work on private sector solutions for this type of housing.

[5:57:39 PM](#)

CHAIR SUMNER announced that SB 239 would be held over.

[5:57:50 PM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 5:57 p.m.