

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 22, 2024

1:31 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Forrest Dunbar, Chair  
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
Senator Cathy Giessel

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Donald Olson, Vice Chair

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 236

"An Act relating to grants to disaster victims."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 8

Recognizing and commending the National Conference of State Legislatures on its 50th anniversary in 2025.

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 179

"An Act prohibiting municipalities from levying a tax on the transfer of real property; prohibiting the state from levying a tax on the transfer of real property; and relating to municipal taxation of mobile telecommunications services."

- MOVED CSSB 179(CRA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 161

"An Act relating to municipal taxation of farm use land; and providing for an effective date."

- REMOVED FROM AGENDA

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 236

SHORT TITLE: GRANTS TO DISASTER VICTIMS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) KIEHL

02/15/24 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/15/24 (S) CRA, FIN  
02/22/24 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SCR 8

SHORT TITLE: RECOGNIZING NCSL ON 50TH ANNIVERSARY

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

01/16/24 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/16/24 (S) CRA  
02/22/24 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 179

SHORT TITLE: PROPERTY TRANSFER TAX; MUNI TELECOMM TAX

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) BJORKMAN

01/16/24 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/12/24  
01/16/24 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/16/24 (S) CRA  
02/15/24 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)  
02/15/24 (S) Heard & Held  
02/15/24 (S) MINUTE(CRA)  
02/22/24 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

**WITNESS REGISTER**

SENATOR JESSE KIEHL, District B  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Sponsor of SB 236.

ELLA ADKISON, Staff  
Senator Jesse Kiehl  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the sectional analysis for SB 236 on behalf of the sponsor.

WADE BRYSON, Assembly Member  
City and Borough of Juneau  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony on behalf of the Juneau Assembly in support of SB 236.

SYLVIA HEINZ, representing self  
Haines, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony in support of SB 236.

STEVE BRADFORD, Vice-President  
Riverside Condo Association  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony in support of SB 236.

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

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced SCR 8 on behalf of the sponsor.

SYDNE ENLUND, State Outreach Manager  
National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)  
Denver, Colorado

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony on SCR 8.

KONRAD JACKSON, Staff  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Explained a Legal Services memo on SB 179 dated February 19, 2024, written by Mr. Dunmire.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:31:10 PM](#)

**CHAIR FORREST DUNBAR** called the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Giessel, Gray-Jackson, Bjorkman, and Chair Dunbar. [Due to technical difficulty, approximately 10 seconds of the recorded minutes were lost at gavel-in. The Senate Records Office log notes were used to complete the record.]

#### **SB 236-GRANTS TO DISASTER VICTIMS**

[1:32:16 PM](#)

**CHAIR DUNBAR** announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 236 "An Act relating to grants to disaster victims."

He said this is the introductory hearing of SB 236. He invited the bill sponsor to put himself on the record and begin his testimony.

[1:32:31 PM](#)

SENATOR JESSE KIEHL, District B, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 236, paraphrased the following sponsor statement:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Living in Alaska is a privilege, but one that comes with costs. Chief among them is the risk of natural disasters. These disasters can upend lives, and be incredibly destructive.

Many of these tragic events do not rise to the level of a federal disaster declared by the President. SB 236 fixes two issues with aid in those state-only disasters. Under current law, Alaskans who survive a disaster can receive a mere \$21,000—half of the federal relief number—from the state to cover the costs of the damage. For many, that doesn't even come close to covering the need. Not only that, but Alaskans who are a part of a condo association can't use that relief to pay off any condo-wide damage. So, if the condo's foundation was damaged, you can't use state help to pay for it—but you can replace furniture. This is a real problem for the citizens of our state.

SB 236 increases the state relief amount to the greater of \$50,000 or half the federal relief allowable. It also gives Alaskans who own a condo the flexibility to pay off their share of condo-wide expenses with that money. It's the least we can do for those striving to recover from a disaster.

[1:33:33 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL said in recent years, constituents and Alaskans statewide have found gaps in the State's response to state-level disasters. SB 236 proposes to close two of these gaps by:

**Increasing the Amount of State Disaster Relief**

- The amount of assistance available from the disaster relief fund for a state-level disaster is currently up to half the amount that FEMA will pay, about \$21,000. He said that does not fix much.

- Senate Bill 236 addresses this by setting the disaster assistance available at the greater of \$50,000 or half of the federal disaster assistance level. State disaster assistance is based on a person's actual losses, not automatically paying \$50,000.

#### **Common Expense Liability for Condo Homeowners Associations**

- The current law does not allow a homeowner in a condo association to cover disaster-caused damages for which the homeowners association bills them. The old saying is that "you own it from the paint in," while the roof and foundation are owned by, and the obligation of, the homeowners association. If the disaster damages the roof or foundation and the homeowners association bills each unit owner, it doesn't meet the current law for state disaster assistance eligibility. SB 236 fixes this by allowing condo owners to use disaster assistance to pay such bills.

[1:36:15 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL said that although the legislature could spend a lot of time and money addressing every possibility of disaster damage, that is not the case with this bill. SB 236 plugs one glaring hole and raises the amount of money provided to fellow Alaskans to get them back on their feet.

[1:36:51 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON asked what the federal disaster amount is.

SENATOR KIEHL replied that it is approximately \$42,000.

[1:37:20 PM](#)

ELLA ADKISON, Staff, Senator Jesse Kiehl, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the following sectional analysis for SB 236 on behalf of the sponsor:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **SB 236 ver. U: Disaster Assistance**

##### **Sectional Analysis**

**Sec. 1:** Repeals and reenacts a previously existing section in statute without substantive changes so the format is consistent with later sections.

**Sec. 2:** Increases the maximum amount of state aid to the greater of \$50,000 or half of the federal maximum, currently, the maximum is approximately \$21,000.

Allows a grantee who is a member of a condo association to use state aid to pay for their share of condo-wide damage expenses.

1:38:24 PM

CHAIR DUNBAR announced invited testimony on SB 236.

1:38:29 PM

WADE BRYSON, Assembly Member, City and Borough of Juneau, Juneau, Alaska, gave invited testimony on behalf of the Mayor and the Juneau Assembly in support of SB 236. He described the flood damage caused by a jokulhlaup at the Mendenhall Glacier last August. Water rose within a foot of cresting the Mendenhall Back Loop Bridge; the bridge is usually 20 feet above the river. He joined Capital City Fire and Rescue and U.S. Senator Murkowski in the observation of land formation changes after the flood. The river straightened where there were once "S" turns, chunks of mountain hundreds of yards long were gone, and large rocks were displaced. He attended a public neighborhood meeting. He reported that residents were scared and panicked. As chair of Public Works and Facilities, he heard public testimony from the community. He said that residents felt the city was unsupportive and expected more aid.

MR. BRYSON said that he felt helpless as a politician. He said the only promise he could make was that there were no promises. The situation was beyond the city's control and relied on the State for relief. Disasters create panic because people do not know what to do next, how quickly aid will come, or if insurance will cover damages. In this case, earth movement disqualified insurance claims. He said an increase in State assistance would provide relief during trying times. He emphasized that most people's wealth is in their homes. He stated that retirees who lost their homes were the most affected and wondered how they would start over. Increasing the assistance cap to \$50,000 offers more surety to citizens experiencing one of the worst moments of their lives where they had no home to return to. He said that no district in Alaska is immune from natural disasters.

MR. BRYSON expressed appreciation to the committee for the opportunity to share his experience and speak on behalf of his community.

[1:43:02 PM](#)

SYLVIA HEINZ, representing self, Haines, Alaska, gave invited testimony in support of SB 236, stating she resides in Haines and Juneau. She said that she worked with the Long Term Recovery Group in Haines. It disbanded after that disaster work concluded. She spoke from her professional experience as the Tribal Emergency Manager for the Chilkoot Indian Association, the Reconstruction Project Manager, and the Deputy Administrator for Alaska Team Rubicon. She said she is honored to have responded to disasters statewide and in the Lower 48.

MS. HEINZ encouraged support of SB 236 for the following reasons:

- Alaskans need it, and the current funding is inadequate. Disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity, and the likelihood of experiencing one is growing.
- The economic benefits. This funding creates jobs, and much of the money goes toward contractors and reconstruction efforts.
- Trust. She said Alaska has one of the country's best Homeland Security and Emergency Management divisions. It and the Individual Assistance (IA) program effectively manage disaster funds.

[1:45:05 PM](#)

MS. HEINZ recounted the 2020 disaster in Haines, where heavy rain and snow led to landslides, fatalities, and significant damage to 250 households. About 34 percent of the community reported damage. She later assessed another 140 households that needed assistance. Communities cannot recover by themselves with those numbers. She said that she could share story after story of the community's reliance on state-managed funding for recovery. Without funding, some people could not get back into their homes and the State would still be supporting them through tax dollars and public assistance. She reiterated that Alaskans need this bill.

[1:47:00 PM](#)

STEVE BRADFORD, Vice-President, Riverside Condo Association, Juneau, Alaska, gave invited testimony in support of SB 236. He described the 2023 flood damage and the subsequent repair costs as follows:

- The association lost one hundred feet of front yard out to the river.
- One hundred cubic yards of soil was lost beneath the most damaged building, which almost collapsed and was nearly lost to the river.
- The association is in the process of repairing that building.
- The total repair costs are expected to be about \$1.09 million.
- State law does not allow financial grants to condo owners, so condo unit owners must bear the cost of repairs. Only single-family residences are entitled up to the \$21,000 in State disaster relief.
- Each condo owner has been assessed \$21,062 for the smaller units and \$26,882 for the larger units.

MR. BRADFORD emphasized that, in many cases, condos are starter homes. Many condo owners could barely afford to get into the condo and pay the monthly condo fees, making these assessments especially burdensome. He noted that the internal costs for sheetrock, tile, and flooring damage were in addition to the condo assessments. Riverside condo owners wholeheartedly support this bill, which would place them on the same emergency benefit eligibility level as single-family homeowners.

[1:49:26 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR asked who insures the Riverside Condo Association and about the insurer's justification for refusing to pay for the damage.

MR. BRADFORD replied that the insurer is State Farm. He said the insurance policy states, "In Alaska, Florida, and several other states, earth movement negates the insurance." He explained that the insurer does not pay for any damage due to earth movement. There was no water on residents' floors, so there was no actual flooding. However, the river whisked away the soil beneath the building and under the foundation. The policy was exactly right. He said that it would not have mattered if the association had flood insurance or not if there was earth movement, the insurance would not pay.

[1:50:44 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR commented that it is unfortunate. He surmised that there are probably a lot of people who think they are covered but are not. It is frightening to think and a little shameful. He thanked Mr. Bradford for his testimony.

[1:51:15 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR opened public testimony on SB 236; finding none, he closed public testimony.

CHAIR DUNBAR held SB 236 in committee.

**SCR 8-RECOGNIZING NCSL ON 50TH ANNIVERSARY**

[1:51:57 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR announced the consideration of SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 8 Recognizing and commending the National Conference of State Legislatures on its 50th anniversary in 2025.

He said this is the introductory hearing of SCR 8. He invited Mr. Lamkin to put himself on the record and introduce the resolution.

[1:52:39 PM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, introduced SCR 8 on behalf of the sponsor, stating NCSL is the acronym for the National Conference of State Legislatures. He presented the highlights of the following sponsor statement:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 8  
Honoring NCSL's 50th Anniversary

SPONSOR STATEMENT

In 1974, three organizations represented the interests of legislators and staff, but their influence was diluted. So seven inventive legislative leaders and two staffers got together and envisioned a single national organization to support, defend and strengthen state legislatures. The three organizations dissolved, and on Jan. 1, 1975, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) was born.

NCSL represents America's legislatures, in each state, territory and commonwealth of the United States. Its mission is to advance the effectiveness, independence and integrity of legislatures and to foster interstate cooperation and facilitate the exchange of information among legislatures.

NCSL also represents legislatures in dealing with the federal government, especially in support of state sovereignty and state flexibility and protection from unfunded federal mandates and unwarranted federal preemption. The conference promotes cooperation between state legislatures in the U.S. and those in other countries.

NCSL is committed to improving the operations and management of state legislatures, and the effectiveness of legislators and legislative staff, encouraging the practice of high standards of conduct by legislators and legislative staff.

Every state legislator and staffer is a member of the organization and has complete access to the latest in bipartisan policy research, training resources and technical assistance tailored specifically to their needs. NCSL offers members a variety of opportunities to connect and collaborate, notably at its signature event, the NCSL Legislative Summit, occurring this year August 5-7, 2024 in Louisville, KY.

May the Alaska Legislature please join in recognizing the NCSL for its 50 years of outstanding service.

[1:54:18 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR took up invited testimony on SCR 8 and asked Ms. Enlund to put herself on the record and begin her testimony.

[1:54:29 PM](#)

SYDNE ENLUND, State Outreach Manager, National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), Denver, Colorado, gave invited testimony on SCR 8. She introduced herself and provided background on NCSL. She explained that NCSL represents legislatures in the states, territories, and commonwealths of the United States. Its mission is to advance the effectiveness, independence, and integrity of legislatures, foster interstate cooperation, and facilitate information exchange among legislatures.

MS. ENLUND said NCSL is excited to celebrate its 50th Anniversary. The celebratory kickoff will occur at the 2024 Legislative Summit in Louisville, Kentucky, and conclude at the 2025 Legislative Summit in Boston, Massachusetts. She said that as NCSL celebrates 50 years of service, it recommits to supporting state legislatures in strengthening representative democracy, modeling civility, and embracing innovation.

[1:55:37 PM](#)

MS. ENLUND said that every state legislator and legislative staffer is a member of NCSL. She emphasized the importance of state legislatures as models of civility and problem-solving. State legislatures are America's laboratories of democracy. She praised legislative staff for their nonpartisan guidance and institutional knowledge. They are vital to ensuring the resilience of democratic ideals.

MS. ENLUND said there are several ways to promote the 50th Anniversary. She encouraged legislators to use NCSL as a policy research resource, share successes in finding common ground, connect with other legislators, and highlight the benefits of NCSL involvement. She mentioned NCSL's podcast, "Across the Aisle," which tells stories of bipartisan cooperation and invited legislators to share their experiences.

[1:58:18 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR opened public testimony on SCR 8; finding none, he closed public testimony.

CHAIR DUNBAR held SCR 8 in committee.

[1:58:43 PM](#)

At ease.

### **SB 179-PROPERTY TRANSFER TAX; MUNI TELECOMM TAX**

[2:02:21 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 179 "An Act prohibiting municipalities from levying a tax on the transfer of real property; prohibiting the state from levying a tax on the transfer of real property; and relating to municipal taxation of mobile telecommunications services."

This second meeting on SB 179 is to hear a recap of the bill, review a Legal Services memo, and take up an amendment. He



[2:05:26 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR confirmed that committee members had the definition before them, then withdrew his objection. Finding no further objection, conceptual Amendment 1 was adopted.

CHAIR DUNBAR invited Senator Bjorkman to make closing remarks.

[2:06:14 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN expressed appreciation to the chair for hearing SB 179. He said he was happy to clarify the session law repealer and bring forward legislation that proposes to relieve property owners from the potential burden of onerous transfer taxes.

[2:06:46 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR solicited the will of the committee.

[2:06:50 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL moved to report SB 179, work order 33-LS1093\A, as amended, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[2:07:14 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR found no objection and CSSB 179(CRA) was reported from the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

[2:07:40 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Dunbar adjourned the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 2:07 p.m.