

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

May 9, 2024

1:33 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Forrest Dunbar, Chair

Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

Senator Jesse Bjorkman

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Donald Olson, Vice Chair

Senator Cathy Giessel

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 345

"An Act relating to safety ladders at municipal harbor facilities; relating to the harbor facility grant fund; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED HB 345 OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 345

SHORT TITLE: HARBOR FACILITIES AND SAFETY LADDERS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) STORY

02/20/24	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/20/24	(H)	CRA
03/14/24	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/14/24	(H)	Moved HB 345 Out of Committee
03/14/24	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/18/24	(H)	CRA RPT 7DP
03/18/24	(H)	DP: MEARS, RUFFRIDGE, MCCABE, BAKER, MCKAY, HIMSCHOOT, MCCORMICK
05/08/24	(H)	TRANSMITTED TO (S)
05/08/24	(H)	VERSION: HB 345
05/09/24	(S)	CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY, District 3

Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Sponsor of HB 345.

JOAN WILKERSON, Staff  
Representative Andi Story  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the sectional analysis for HB 347.

MATTHEW CRESWELL, Harbormaster  
Docks and Harbors  
City and Bureau of Juneau  
Juneau, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony in support of HB 345.

LAURA EDFELT, representing self  
Juneau, Alaska  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony in support of HB 345.

ELLEN FOLTZ, representing self  
Asheville, North Carolina  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 345.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:33:01 PM](#)

**CHAIR FORREST DUNBAR** called the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:33 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Gray-Jackson, Bjorkman, and Chair Dunbar.

#### **HB 345-HARBOR FACILITIES AND SAFETY LADDERS**

[1:33:26 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR announced the consideration of HOUSE BILL NO. 345 "An Act relating to safety ladders at municipal harbor facilities; relating to the harbor facility grant fund; and providing for an effective date."

This is the introductory hearing of HB 345. The intention is to move the bill from committee today. He invited the bill sponsor to offer comments on the bill.

[1:33:44 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY, District 3, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of HB 345 stated that HB 345 focuses on

saving lives by requiring safety ladders on docks. A constituent informed her that his employee, Anna Foltz, drowned due to a dock-related incident and believes safety ladders might have helped prevent the tragedy. She explained that people who fall into the water from floating docks often struggle to climb back up due to a lack of handholds, with only slick, barnacle-encrusted pilings available.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY cited a state epidemiology report showing that 26 percent of Alaskan drownings from 2016 to 2021 occurred in oceans or harbors, with 20 percent involving boats or docks. She emphasized that safety ladders allow a person to pull down the lowest rung to climb up or stabilize themselves while awaiting help. HB 345 would require municipalities receiving harbor facility grant funds to install safety ladders on floating docks.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY noted that HB 345 carries a zero fiscal note, as municipalities would fund the ladders through harbor grants, with each ladder costing approximately \$210. She highlighted the heavy use of docks for commercial and recreational purposes and argued that adding safety ladders was a cost-effective way to improve safety. She shared that working on the HB 345 has increased her awareness of dock safety and that Juneau's harbor staff have placed signs marking existing safety ladders. She encouraged members to notice these signs and recognize that many other harbors lack similar safety measures.

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SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON thanked the bill sponsor for bringing the bill forward and expressed hope that since HB 345 does not have a fiscal note it will pass into law and save lives.

[1:38:38 PM](#)

JOAN WILKERSON, Staff, Representative Andi Story, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the sectional analysis for HB 345.

**Sectional Analysis**  
**House Bill 345 Version B**

March 25, 2024

*"An Act relating to safety ladders at municipal harbor facilities; relating to the harbor facility grant fund; and providing for an effective date."*

**Section 1:** Amends AS 29.60.810 by adding new subsection (5) which requires that a municipality or regional housing authority that owns a harbor facility and submits an application for a harbor facility grant for major maintenance, repair, construction or expansion of the facility to have safety ladders on its floats or install them on the proposed new float once built.

**Section 2:** Provides an effective date of July 1, 2024.

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CHAIR DUNBAR announced invited testimony on HB 345 and listed individuals available to answer questions.

[1:39:47 PM](#)

MATTHEW CRESWELL, Harbormaster, Docks and Harbors, City and Bureau of Juneau, Juneau, Alaska, gave invited testimony in support of HB 345 stating Senator Story approached him about the bill a few months ago, and he viewed it as an obvious and necessary measure. He noted strong support from Juneau and the Alaska Association of Harbor Masters and Port Administration, where he serves as a board member. Although the board did not formally review the bill, conversations with member communities indicated unanimous backing.

MR. CRESWELL explained that about three years ago, Juneau identified a need for more safety ladders in harbors, partially motivated by peer pressure from nearby Southeast Alaska harbors that had already installed "up and out" ladders. These ladders mount above the waterline but can be pulled down from the water, allowing someone to self-rescue. He emphasized that this was simply the right thing to do.

MR. CRESWELL described how older harbor float systems in Juneau had a low freeboard (8-12 inches), which made it easier for people to pull themselves out of the water. However, after harbor upgrades, the new floats have a two-foot freeboard, making self-rescue nearly impossible, especially in cold water. Previous ladder installations required two people and were ineffective if someone fell in when alone, such as at night.

MR. CRESWELL said Juneau adopted "up and out" ladders costing around \$200-210 each, with discounts for bulk orders. Juneau launched its own initiative to install these ladders throughout the harbors, with approximately 200 ladders now placed across four harbors. The current spacing is one ladder for every four

boats, marked with snow delineators and flags to ensure visibility.

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MR. CRESWELL stated the goal is to have a ladder within 100 feet of any point on the dock, with plans to reduce that distance to 50 feet. He stressed that after witnessing several winter drowning incidents during his eight years with the Department of Docks and Harbors—including four as harbor master—self-rescue is critical. The ladders have already saved lives, and although there is no code requiring them, he described the measure as low-cost and life-saving.

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CHAIR DUNBAR asked for a visualization of where the ladders are placed relative to the main float and slips.

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MR. CRESWELL replied that each stall contains two slips, and the safety ladder is placed in the middle of the stall. As a result, the current configuration alternates with one boat, then a stall without a ladder, followed by another boat and a ladder—creating a ratio of one ladder for every four boats. He stated that the goal is to reduce this spacing to one ladder for every two boats.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN asked for a description of how the ladder extends and how far it is above the water.

[1:44:29 PM](#)

MR. CRESWELL replied that the ladder is designed to stay out of the water when not in use to prevent marine growth and barnacle buildup, which helps maintain its condition. When someone is in the water, they can reach up about 12 inches to grab the ladder and pull it down. The ladder then extends 18 to 24 inches into the water, allowing a person to place a foot on it and climb out.

CHAIR BJORKMAN expressed thanks for the explanation.

[1:45:15 PM](#)

LAURA EDFELT, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, gave invited testimony in support of HB 345 stating she wanted to share the story of Anna Foltz on behalf of Anna's friends, family, and colleagues. Anna was a recent Alaska resident who embraced the state's beauty with enthusiasm, joy, and a vibrant personality

that uplifted those around her. She loved the outdoors, especially cold-water swims, and typically had someone with her during those times.

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MS. EDFELT recounted that on the night of October 17, 2021, Anna went for a walk with her dog to view the northern lights and decided to take a quick swim off the dock at Indian Cove in Juneau. The water's temperature shocked her system, and she drowned. Despite being strong, healthy, and 38 years old, Anna could not pull herself out of the water. The investigating officer believed that if an egress ladder had been available, Anna would have survived.

MS. EDFELT read the following letter from Anna's mother:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Hello, my name is Ellen Foltz. I had the privilege of seeing beautiful Alaska in June of 2021 when my daughter, Anna, convinced me to embark on a jet ski adventure up the Inside Passage with Dangerous Water Adventures. I was very reluctant to do it but it turned out to be one of the best things I have ever done in my life. Going on an exciting adventure with my only daughter. Little did I know that June, when I hugged her good bye, it would be the last time I saw her. Anna drowned 3 months later, in Indian Cove, the night of Oct 17. The forensics verified that she had tried to climb up the barnacled piling of the dock, trying to get out of the frigid water. That image of my child struggling in the cold water will haunt me to the end of my days.

Today, March 14, oddly enough is her birthday. Anna would have been 41.

I strongly urge that Bill 345 supporting the installation of safety ladders through harbor grants be passed to help reduce tragic, accidental drownings such as Anna's.

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MS. EDFELT said in closing that she wanted to leave the committee with several points to consider. The United States has 12,383 miles of coastline, and Alaska accounts for 6,640 miles—over 53 percent. She asked how many harbors and docks exist along Alaska's extensive coastline, and how many loved ones, both young and old, use them for various activities. She

compared harbor docks to swimming pools, noting that pools—which are shallow, warm, and staffed with lifeguards—are legally required to have egress ladders in every corner under federal, state, or municipal law. Alaska’s harbors, by contrast, lack such requirements despite their frigid, dangerous waters. She emphasized that the cost of a safety ladder is minimal compared to the value of a life and urged the committee to pass HB 345 to help prevent avoidable deaths. She concluded by stating that these tragedies are preventable and asked the committee to support HB 345 to help save lives, emphasizing that the next life lost could be someone they care about.

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CHAIR DUNBAR opened public testimony on HB 345.

[1:51:07 PM](#)

ELLEN FOLTZ, representing self, Asheville, North Carolina, testified in support of HB 345. She stated that if a ladder had been installed at the dock, Anna would still be alive. She said the image of Anna struggling to get out of the water will haunt her for the rest of her life. She expressed deep gratitude to Representative Story for introducing HB 345 and noted that everyone has someone they love who might one day be drawn to Alaska’s beautiful waters. She emphasized the importance of having visible ladders available for those in distress, adding that she had not realized how quickly the body seizes up in cold water. She voiced strong support for installing safety ladders and closed by saying, “I miss my daughter.”

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CHAIR DUNBAR closed public testimony on HB 345.

[1:52:54 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR solicited the will of the committee.

[1:52:57 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON moved to report HB 345, work order 33-LS1378\B, from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note(s).

[1:53:14 PM](#)

CHAIR DUNBAR found no objection and HB 345 was reported from the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

[1:53:19 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Dunbar adjourned the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting at [1:53 p.m.].