

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

February 13, 2024

3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator David Wilson, Chair
Senator Löki Tobin
Senator Forrest Dunbar
Senator Cathy Giessel

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator James Kaufman, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 149

"An Act relating to the supplemental nutrition assistance program; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 149

SHORT TITLE: FOOD STAMP PROGRAM ELIGIBILTY

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) GIESSEL

05/13/23	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
05/13/23	(S)	HSS, FIN
02/13/24	(S)	HSS AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

PAIGE BROWN, Staff
Senator Cathy Giessel
Alaska State Legislature,
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Offered the following sectional analysis for SB 149.

DEB ETHERIDGE, Director
Division of Public Assistance
Department of Health (DOH)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on SB 149.

RON MEEHAN, Director

Government Affairs

Food Bank of Alaska

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Invited testimony for SB 149.

CARA DURR, CEO

Food Bank of Alaska

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Invited testimony for SB 149.

SCOTT LINGLE, CEO

Beans Café

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 149.

AUTUMN SMITH-AMY, Owner

Northwest Regional Relative and Kinship Providers

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 149.

MILENA SEVIGNY, Executive Director

Kids Cupboard

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 149.

GREG MEYER, Executive Director

Kenai Peninsula Food Bank

Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 149.

EDDIE EZELLE, Executive Director

Mat-Su Food Bank

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 149.

ERIN WALKER-TOLLES, Executive Director

Catholic Community Services

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 149.

ROBIN DEMPSEY, CEO

Catholic Social Services

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 149.

CLAY VENETIS, Representative
Alaska Food Coalition
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 149.

KEVIN KNOWLTON, Emergency Preparedness Specialist
Kawerak Inc.
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 149.

SUMMER SWEET, Representative
Alaska Food Coalition
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 149.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:57 PM](#)

CHAIR DAVID WILSON called the Senate Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Giessel, Dunbar, Tobin, and Chair Wilson.

SB 149-FOOD STAMP PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

[3:32:24 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 149 "An Act relating to the supplemental nutrition assistance program; and providing for an effective date."

[3:32:47 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL, speaking as sponsor of SB 149, gave the following bill introduction:

This bill would put in place a new way of authorizing individuals to get food assistance by implementing a broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) standard for qualifying for nutritional supplementation. Right now, we have what's known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). It serves one in eight Alaskans. As we all know, it's been in the paper that there's difficulty with the Department of Health in getting these SNAP payments out to Alaskans for multiple reasons, none of which are due to any untoward intent by that department. The department is

working hard to get those out but faces multiple challenges.

By moving to the BBCE, we will be joining 42 other states and two territories that use this method for distributing nutritional supplements. It helps streamline the administrative issues, decreases the asset tests, and just makes it a whole lot easier for the department and for the families to apply.

Now, Mr. Chairman, at some point, someone is going to ask if this will cost us more since increased eligibility might lead to more applicants. Of course, we have a fiscal note. The fiscal note mentions needing two additional people, but Mr. Chairman, I would call your attention to the Senate Finance Committee table, which got feedback from the Department of Health. It points out the \$3 million UGF appropriation in supplemental appropriations to the department for grant funding for food banks. The ongoing backlog of SNAP payments leaves food banks needing assistance. So, the supplemental budget includes a \$3 million UGF. The FY 25 budget has a proposed one-time appropriation of \$1.5 million to the Department of Health to work toward bulk purchases for food banks and pantries. Not doing this will cost us millions and leave people without food.

[3:35:58 PM](#)

PAIGE BROWN, Staff, Senator Cathy Giessel, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, Offered the following sectional analysis for SB 149.

[Original punctuation provided.]

Senate Bill 149 (Vsn A)

Sectional Analysis

"An Act relating to the supplemental nutrition assistance program; and providing for an effective date."

Section 1. Amends AS. 47.25.980(a)(3):

This section updates the reference to the chapter of United States code governing the Supplemental

Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This section also increases the household income limits for the SNAP program from 130 percent to 200 percent of the Alaska poverty standard and eliminates the household asset test.

Section 2. Amends uncodified law by adding a new section:

This section provides the authority for the Department of Health to adopt the necessary regulations to implement this Act.

Section 3. Provides for an effective date for Section 2:

Section 2 has an immediate effective date.

Section 4. Provides for an effective date.

Except as provided in sec. 3, the effective date of this Act is July 1, 2025.

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CHAIR TOBIN asked how many department staff currently process SNAP benefits.

[3:37:07 PM](#)

MS. BROWN deferred the question.

[3:37:25 PM](#)

DEB ETHERIDGE, Director, Division of Public Assistance, Department of Health (DOH), Juneau, Alaska, replied that there are approximately 229 individuals processing eligibility who could handle a SNAP benefit.

[3:37:46 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN said the fiscal note indicates that the department estimates needing two positions to implement BBCE changes. She asked if the department anticipates the changes creating a reduction in the number of positions required to process SNAP applications.

[3:38:04 PM](#)

MS. ETHERIDGE replied that the change allows for administrative simplification in the SNAP program and can decrease the error rate by removing the asset requirement. However, the impact on

participation rates is unknown, making it difficult to project a need for fewer eligibility technicians. The fiscal notes in SB 149 relate to the broad-based categorical eligibility being tied to eligibility for a non-cash benefit through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), this is a new requirement. The two requested positions are for training and oversight of eligibility technicians and internal quality case reviews, which result in ongoing education and training for staff. This additional oversight and training benefits not only eligibility technicians but ensures the division appropriately administers the SNAP program and provides the correct benefits.

[3:39:44 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN asked how many employees currently process TANF applications.

MS. ETHERIDGE stated that most eligibility technicians work on all programs, though a small number were brought on board specifically to process Medicaid to assist with Medicaid unwinding. These are single-program eligibility technicians. She clarified that the non-cash TANF benefit isn't an eligibility program they would process. Instead, it provides education and training that meets the goals of TANF to SNAP participants. There are four goals within TANF that they would have to provide the non-cash benefit to, and in some states, this benefit could be an education and training brochure with available resources to individuals to meet the purpose of TANF.

[3:41:24 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN noted that the fiscal note projects ongoing support and sought clarification. She asked if the need for policy, training, and updates identified by the department would continue in addition to the 229 existing positions. She acknowledged that the SB 149 aims to streamline and decrease complexity in processing applications and ease eligibility, potentially increasing the number of qualifying Alaskans. She expressed difficulty understanding the ongoing fiscal impact of this program if potential cost savings could be realized and asked for further explanation.

[3:42:12 PM](#)

MS. ETHERIDGE explained that this is a layered approach within the division, additional work has a significant impact due to the high turnover rate of eligibility technicians. The ongoing requirement is necessary because training and education efforts in the first year will not suffice for future years. Continuous monitoring of quality is also essential. This approach aims to

build capacity within the division to properly administer the program on an ongoing basis.

[3:43:03 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON recalled Commissioner Hedberg's discussion about the department's multiple backlogs. He asked if SB 149 became law with an immediate effective date, what would be a reasonable timeframe for its implementation.

MS. ETHERIDGE replied that the milestones timeframe involves shifting the SNAP eligibility program from the current eligibility information system to a cloud-based module. The estimated date of implementation is July 1, 2025, which aligns with the planned transition. She noted that no additional funds were requested for system changes because the legislature supported these changes last year.

[3:44:17 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON announced a presentation on SB 147.

[3:44:34 PM](#)

MS. BROWN moved to slide 2 and said:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SNAP Background

- 1964, U.S. established the Food Stamp Program
- In 1971, Alaska joined SNAP (renamed 2008)
- The mission is to address food insecurity, and provide financial assistance for low-income individuals and families, as well as encourage economic stability community-wide

[3:44:59 PM](#)

MS. BROWN moved to slide 3 and said there are three food security issues in Alaska:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Food Security Issues in AK

- Food Supply in Alaska - Transportation and Distribution
- Dependency on Imports - Vulnerable to supply chain disruptions, lack of locally grown food
- SNAP Backlog - Residents are waiting up to 10 months for SNAP benefits, Old Computer System

[3:45:34 PM](#)

MS. BROWN moved to slide 4 and read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Current SNAP requirements:

- Household Income Limit - 130% of the current Alaska poverty standard
- Household Resource Limit - Asset Test
- Citizenship and Residency - Resident of the state of Alaska
- Work Requirements - Must register for work, accept offers of employment, cannot quit a job.

[3:45:56 PM](#)

MS. BROWN moved to slide 5 and said broad based categorical eligibility would provide the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Broad Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE):

- Income Flexibility: Extends flexibility to households with income up to 200 percent of the federal poverty guideline.
- Asset Simplification: Asset test is relaxed, focusing more on income as a determinant.
- Streamlined Process: Reduces administrative burden with less emphasis on asset documentation.
- Alignment with Federal Guidelines: Adopts guidelines to streamline SNAP access

[3:46:22 PM](#)

MS. BROWN moved to slide 6 and said BBCE is used in 42 states and 2 territories.

[3:46:30 PM](#)

MS. BROWN moved to slide 7 and shared the following benefits:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Benefits of BBCE

- Simplified Application Process - long-term cost savings in administration
- Economic Stimulus - directs funds into local economies

- Eliminates the "Benefits Cliff" - less risk of losing more value of benefits than raise in income
- Eliminates the asset test - saves time on application

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SENATOR TOBIN said she noticed that 42 other states have moved to broad-based eligibility. She asked if there is any anecdotal or quantitative data on whether this change increased departmental needs to support applications and if there was an increase in usage that created an undue burden on the departments processing these applications.

[3:47:32 PM](#)

MS. BROWN deferred the question.

[3:47:57 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON announced invited testimony on SB 149.

[3:48:12 PM](#)

RON MEEHAN, Director, Government Affairs, Food Bank of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, stated he is also the manager of the Alaska Food Coalition. The Alaska Food Coalition represents more than 180 food banks, food pantries, tribal organizations, faith-based groups, and educational groups across the state. He stated that he supports of SB 149 and the implementation of broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) because it could significantly increase government efficiency, allow Alaskans to save and get off the program, and provide economic security to hardworking Alaskan families.

He stated that SNAP is the most effective food assistance program in the United States, helping more than 92,000 Alaskans, or 1 in 8, put food on the table. The program stimulates the economy, particularly for local businesses and rural communities, with the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimating that for every federal \$1 spent in SNAP benefits \$1.50 is generated in economic activity. He emphasized that during the recent SNAP backlog, Alaskans in need turned to food banks and food pantries, which are already stretched thin and seeing record levels of use.

[3:50:12 PM](#)

MR. MEEHAN argued that SB 149 would improve the SNAP program. SNAP, a federal program administered by the state, allows significant latitude in administration. BBCE would enable the state to eliminate the asset test and raise the eligibility

threshold from 130 percent to 200 percent of the base poverty level. Asset verification is time-consuming, error-prone, and difficult, involving items like homes, properties, bank accounts, equipment, vehicles, and subsistence tools.

MS. MEEHAN said eliminating the asset test would reduce administrative time, save money, and allow the division to process applications faster. Currently, households cannot have more than \$2,750 in the bank, or \$4,250 for those with at least one elderly or disabled family member. Allowing people to save without losing benefits helps them become self-sufficient. He noted that Alaska is one of only nine states that do not use BBCE, while 41 states and two U.S. territories have effectively utilized it to help people get out of poverty and off the program.

MR. MEEHAN said raising the income limit and removing the asset test would enable SNAP participants to achieve financial security by accepting pay raises, saving for the future, and gradually reducing benefits rather than facing a benefits cliff. This approach would prevent the state from punishing working Alaskans for becoming more economically independent, raise the income level, and provide targeted assistance to low-income working families and seniors, enhancing government efficiency and program functioning.

[3:52:16 PM](#)

CARA DURR, CEO, Food Bank of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, said broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) is a state option that will help reduce administrative costs and incentivize long-term economic security for families and individuals. BBCE allows the state to do two things: eliminate the asset test and raise the gross income limit for certain households. She focused first on the benefits of removing the asset test, noting it would provide significant cost savings to the state, especially as the SNAP agency struggles with capacity issues.

She said assets are difficult and time-consuming to verify, which is why 40 states, regardless of political affiliation, have eliminated the SNAP asset test to reduce administrative burdens. The only recent exception is Iowa, which required an asset test in 2023. Iowa's fiscal note estimated it would take an additional 28 minutes per case to verify assets. Given their caseload of 135,000 households, they would need 47 new full-time employees (FTEs) at a cost of over \$2.8 million per year. Applying this logic to Alaska's caseload of about 22,000

households, she estimated Alaska could spend at least \$450,000 annually in staff time to check assets for SNAP households.

MS. DURR said while Alaska might have initial costs for staff training, long-term savings are likely to accrue, allowing FTE time to be redeployed to critical casework like preventing future application backlogs and reducing the state's payment error rate.

[3:54:42 PM](#)

MS. DURR said currently, Alaska uses the federal baseline for asset which is \$2,750 for most households. This doesn't allow for meaningful savings or emergency funds. For example, someone with \$5,000 in the bank trying to save for a car would be denied SNAP benefits but could qualify if they spent the money down. This system discourages savings, which is critical for transitioning out of poverty. Without BBCE, low-income Alaskans are disincentivized to save, encouraging temporary assistance over financial stability.

She said the second benefit of BBCE is the ability to raise the gross income limit, which primarily benefits low-income working families with children. Without BBCE, SNAP recipients face a benefit cliff where a small raise at work could disqualify them from benefits, leaving them at a net loss. BBCE eliminates the benefit cliff by tapering down SNAP benefits as income rises, incentivizing work and career advancement.

MS. DURR acknowledged the Division of Public Assistance's efforts to clear the backlog and commended Commissioner Hedberg, Director Etheridge, and their team for their thoughtful and transparent work. However, she noted that many positive changes would take time to show results and that additional administrative burdens remain when interviewers are reimplemented. BBCE will create efficiencies, reduce the burden for DPA eligibility workers, and help Alaskans in need find relief. She encouraged the committee to move SB 149 forward.

[3:56:46 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN asked when broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) was first introduced and if there is data showing whether it resulted in an increased need for additional staff to process applications in the departments responsible for it in states where it has been enacted. She also inquired if there was a significant increase in eligibility and the associated costs borne by the populous.

[3:57:22 PM](#)

MS. DURR replied that she didn't have a definitive answer regarding when BBCE was first implemented and suggested it might have been a state option all along, noting that there are many state options for SNAP. She said she wasn't sure about the impact on enrollment but mentioned that the population benefiting from BBCE is typically narrow, primarily working families with children who have significant expenses. BBCE is not expected to "open the floodgates" since recipients still must meet the net income limit.

MS. DURR mentioned that while there is some data indicating that SNAP recipients generally do not have significant assets, she could gather more information for the committee. Seniors are hesitant to disclose assets, even when not substantial. There could be a small increase in enrollment, but she argued that those needing benefits would receive them, which would be positive for the overburdened network. She concluded by saying that BBCE is largely seen as a cost-saving measure and concerns about increased enrollment have not been a major point of discussion.

MR. MEEHAN added that the assistance provided to new recipients under BBCE is very targeted. He noted that, in the long term, this would enable people to save and eventually get off the program. This potential outcome should be considered when evaluating the number of people utilizing BBCE.

[3:59:27 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN said she took a quick glance at the MIT Living Wage Calculator, which indicates that a family of four in the Anchorage Municipality needs to earn a little over \$60,800 to make a living wage. She asked for thoughts on how BBCE would help families currently earning less than \$60,000 in Anchorage.

[4:00:41 PM](#)

MS. DURR replied that BBCE would help low-income families who are working but currently earn above the income level to qualify for SNAP benefits. She acknowledged that SNAP benefits have a low qualification threshold and are supplemental, meaning they are not sufficient by themselves. While more could certainly be done to support these families, she sees BBCE as a good start. It helps those with significant expenses who are working by opening the door for them. She emphasized the importance of finding ways to support those who fall into the gap where they are over the income limit for many benefits but still need

assistance, which unfortunately represents a significant portion of the population.

[4:01:28 PM](#)

MR. MEEHAN responded that the current structure of SNAP disincentivizes work. By allowing families to save to get off the program and eliminating the benefits cliff, BBCE will incentivize and enable working families to take a second job or accept raises. Currently, earning even \$1 more can result in losing benefits and ultimately leaving families worse off.

[4:02:03 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON concluded invited testimony on SB 149.

[4:02:16 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON opened invited testimony on SB 149.

[4:02:52 PM](#)

SCOTT LINGLE, CEO, Beans Café, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 149. He expressed strong support for SB 149, stating that it would bring significant positive changes and benefit communities. He shared stories of families losing SNAP benefits due to minor income increases, emphasizing that these small amounts could help with unexpected expenses. He urged the committee to support SB 149, highlighting its potential to make a lasting impact on many individuals in the state.

[4:07:16 PM](#)

AUTUMN SMITH-AMY, Owner, Northwest Regional Relative and Kinship Providers, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 149. She said Northwest Regional Relative and Kinship Providers is a grassroots community group serving BIPOC families. The group provides representation in administrative appeals for denied SNAP benefits and supports broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE). She emphasized that eliminating asset limits encourages families to save, increases economic independence, and improves employment retention. Highlighting successful BBCE implementation in Virginia and Colorado, she argued that Alaska could save millions and reduce the backlog. She expressed concern about potential financial liabilities for Alaska due to overpayment errors and urged support for BBCE to enhance fiscal responsibility and reduce long standing challenging backlogs.

[4:12:20 PM](#)

MILENA SEVIGNY, Executive Director, Kids Cupboard, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in support of SB 149. She said she wanted to highlight some differences that might not have been discussed,

particularly concerning communities off the road system or those with limited access. For example, in areas like Skwentna on the Yentna River, people rely on boats or snowmachines to reach town and get food. Owning these modes of transportation could disqualify them from SNAP due to the asset test. She emphasized that this issue also affects those on the road system, where poor road conditions in the spring force residents to use four-wheelers instead of cars. She argued that Alaska has unique asset needs and urged the implementation of Senate Bill 149 as a unique solution for the state.

[4:14:06 PM](#)

GREG MEYER, Executive Director, Kenai Peninsula Food Bank, Soldotna, Alaska, testified in support of SB 149. He said that his food bank has worked hard to keep neighbors fed during the backlog, covering the entire Kenai Peninsula through 46 different pantries and a direct service center. He noted the struggle many neighbors face in accessing services, especially older adults who struggle with technology. The goal is to help families move toward sustainability, but the asset test creates setbacks. He shared an example of a family where the mother quit her job after receiving a car, which pushed them over the asset limit so she quit her job. He argued that eliminating the asset test would help families save for necessities like rent and still feed their families. He urged support for changes that would help Alaskan families and improve service efficiency.

[4:15:57 PM](#)

EDDIE EZELLE, Executive Director, Mat-Su Food Bank, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in support of SB 149. He said that although his food pantry does not handle SNAP sign-ups or coupons, they are distributing more food to more people. Currently, they serve about 149 people a day, five days a week. The number of people served has increased, recently reaching around 9,500. This rising demand affects their operations, and he urged support for SB 149. He offered his pantry's assistance in any further efforts and emphasized that the impact extends beyond those directly handling SNAP.

[4:17:43 PM](#)

ERIN WALKER-TOLLES, Executive Director, Catholic Community Services (CCS), Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of SB 149. She said that Catholic Community Service (CCS) provides hot meals for seniors free of charge five days a week, serving over 2,000 seniors and delivering over 131,000 meals last year in Southeast, Alaska. Many seniors rely on these meals due to fixed incomes and rising costs, sometimes having to choose between

food and other essentials. She emphasized that broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) would help more seniors access SNAP benefits, improve their health, and save communities money. She also mentioned her 14 years of experience with the State of Alaska Division of Public Assistance, working five years as the SNAP director. Supporting BBCE is a simple policy change that would simplify eligibility work and save the state money.

[4:21:16 PM](#)

ROBIN DEMPSEY, CEO, Catholic Social Services, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 149. She said that Catholic Social Services supports vulnerable Alaskans on their path to permanent stability and self-sufficiency. In 2023, they assisted over 16,000 children and adults through various programs, including St. Francis House, one of the state's largest food pantries. She noted a significant rise in food insecurity, with a 30 percent increase in individuals served in FY 2023. Implementing broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) for SNAP would expand access, primarily benefiting working families and seniors by removing the asset test and reducing administrative burdens. She urged support for the bill.

[4:23:36 PM](#)

CLAY VENETIS, Representative, Alaska Food Coalition, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 149. He said he represents small farmers and previously represented SNAP beneficiaries at Alaska Legal Services in Anchorage, Bethel, and Fairbanks. He emphasized the urgent need to address food insecurity, sharing that many Alaskans are struggling, including a client who couldn't feed her daughters on Christmas Eve due to delayed SNAP payments. SB 149 would help by allowing beneficiaries to save and reducing administrative burdens. He concluded by expressing his desire to live in a state that ensures everyone has enough to eat, supporting broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) as a vital step.

[4:25:52 PM](#)

KEVIN KNOWLTON, Emergency Preparedness Specialist, Kawerak Inc., Nome, Alaska, testified in support of SB 149. He said Kawerak, Inc. represents 20 tribes in the Bering Straits region, from Shishmaref down to Stebbins, and supports Senate Bill 149. He emphasized that broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) would streamline application processes by combining information from different programs like Medicaid and SNAP, saving time for individuals and departments. He noted that while one in eight families in Alaska are on SNAP, the number is much higher in western Alaska, where six or seven out of eight families rely on

SNAP because there are no alternatives and limited job opportunities. Delayed SNAP benefits force families to find alternative resources, often making them choose between heating their homes and buying food. He urged support for SB 149 to help resilient Alaskans who face increasing challenges with food insecurity.

[4:30:31 PM](#)

SUMMER SWEET, Representative, Alaska Food Coalition, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 149. She said she also works at the University of Alaska Anchorage as a health promotion specialist, focusing on health and wellness, including food insecurity and lack of basic needs. Surveys at the university show that 43 to 45 percent of students face food insecurity and 10 percent face homelessness. The campus food pantry and emergency food bags provide short-term relief but rely on multiple fund-raising efforts plus donations, which will eventually run out. This situation forces students to consider taking multiple jobs or dropping out. Many students, supporting families or working multiple jobs, may not qualify for SNAP or other assistance. She highlighted the struggles younger populations face in meeting basic needs and the importance of support and education.

[4:33:28 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON closed public testimony on SB 149.

[4:33:52 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL expressed thanks to everyone who testified, appreciating their stories and the data shared. She noted that the testimonies highlighted the widespread need for support, affecting all Alaskans, from seniors to college students. She mentioned that the fiscal note for SB 149 is less than \$300,000 a year but will serve a large population. She also highlighted that the state is already appropriating \$4.5 million over the next two fiscal years to address SNAP issues, suggesting that implementing broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) could save money by ensuring food security for everyone. She thanked the chairman and committee members for hearing the bill.

[4:35:12 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON held SB 149 in committee.

[4:35:51 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Wilson adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 4:35 p.m.