

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

January 24, 2024

1:42 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Click Bishop, Vice Chair
Senator Kelly Merrick

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S) : UAA WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS FOR ALASKA

- HEARD

SENATE BILL NO. 173

"An Act requiring school districts to grant qualified persons an assigned duty to carry a concealed handgun on school grounds under certain conditions; relating to standards, training, and continuing education in firearms training for qualified persons granted an assigned duty to carry a concealed handgun on school grounds; relating to communication of school districts with state and local law enforcement; and relating to school crisis response plans."

HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 173

SHORT TITLE: AUTHORIZE HANDGUNS SCHOOL EMPLOYEE/VOLUNT

SPONSOR(S) : SENATOR(S) HUGHES

01/16/24	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/12/24
01/16/24	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/24	(S)	L&C, JUD
01/24/24	(S)	L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

DENISE RUNGE, Provost
University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented UAA Workforce Solutions for Alaska.

DEBBIE CRAIG, Dean
College of Health (COH)
University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented UAA Workforce Solutions for Alaska.

CHERYL SIEMERS, Director
Kenai Peninsula College (KPC)
University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented UAA Workforce Solutions for Alaska.

RAYMOND WEBER, Dean of Community and Technical College
University of Alaska Anchorage
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on the presentation: UAA Workforce Solutions for Alaska.

SENATOR SHELLEY HUGHES, District M
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 173.

DONNA ANTHONY, Chief of Police
Chickaloon Tribal Police Department
Chickaloon, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 173.

JIM IRVINE, President
Buckeye Firearms Foundation,
Faster Saves Lives Director
Cleveland, Ohio

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 173.

STEVE ROSE, Superintendent
Russia Local School
Russia, Ohio

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 173.

DIANNA MULLER, member
Women for Gun Rights
Las Vegas, Nevada

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 173.

DEBORAH RIDDLE, Division Operations Manager
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Reported on the Fiscal Note OMB 2202 for SB 173.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:42:35 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN called the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:42 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Dunbar, Gray-Jackson and Chair Bjorkman.

PRESENTATION(S): UAA WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS FOR ALASKA

[1:43:45 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced a presentation from University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) titled, "UAA Workforce Solutions for Alaska."

[1:43:55 PM](#)

DENISE RUNGE, Provost, University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), Anchorage, Alaska, Co-presented UAA Workforce Solutions for Alaska. She expressed her enthusiasm to share what state universities are doing to support the need for workforce solutions in Alaska.

[1:44:22 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE noted that the University of Alaska Anchorage is the largest provider of workforce training and education in the state, due to the myriad ways in which the college provides training.

[1:44:44 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE reviewed slide 2:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Alaska's Largest Workforce Provider

- **UAA Creates Opportunity through Education**

- **Serving Alaska 70 years**
 - **Comprehensive open-access university**
- **Enroll +11,500 students**
- **Prepare students for careers through +180 programs from certificates to doctoral degrees**

MS. RUNGE explained that "open access" means that students who have earned a GED or a High School diploma with a 2.0 grade point average have opportunities available to them at UAA. She stated that UAA also offers non-credited training programs.

[1:45:37 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE reviewed slide 3:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Dual-Mission Serving Alaska

- **Combines both community college and four-year college under single university.**
- **Leader in Career & Technical Education**
- **Industry-driven programs and partnerships**
- **Community-based opportunities**

MS. RUNGE noted that in the late 1980s, the University of Alaska merged with Anchorage Community College, along with several other community colleges in central Alaska, to form the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). The University of Alaska fully embraces the dual mission of serving as a university while also providing a quality community college experience.

[1:46:30 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE reviewed slide 4:

[Original punctuation provided.]

High-Demand Industries - Aviation

- **Alaska's largest flight school.**
- **Specialized programs for advancing pilot training and aviation management.**
- **Strong industry and K-12 partnerships.**
- **Pilot program currently full capacity.**

MS. RUNGE noted that university experts are available to share information about specific high-demand industry programs.

[1:47:01 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE stated that prior to holding the position of Provost, she was the Dean of the UAA's Community and Technical College (CTC).

MS. RUNGE stated that aviation is one of the university's top career and technical education programs. UAA hosts Alaska's largest flight school. This is done in collaboration and partnership with other flight schools. The aviation program offers several specialized programs, including advanced pilot training and aviation management. The program maintains industry and K-12 partnerships, which provide dual enrollment opportunities for students. She stated that the pilot program is currently at full capacity and the University works closely with the industry to meet the demand.

[1:47:52 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE reviewed slide 5:

[Original punctuation provided.]

High-Demand Industries - Aviation

- **Aviation Maintenance program full-capacity, high demand amongst prospective students.**
- **Graduates sought by industry, nationally recognized in maintenance competitions.**
- **Air Traffic Control program features nation-leading simulators**
 - Graduates receive preferential hiring with FAA.

MS. RUNGE noted that the Aviation Maintenance program is in high demand and its graduates are approached by perspective employers well before graduation. She stated that the Air Traffic Control program is unique in Alaska and in the West. One of the faculty members was previously employed at the Federal Aviation Administration Academy (FAA Academy) in Oklahoma; this has allowed UAA to tailor its Air Traffic Controller program to better meet the needs of the industry. The UAA Air Traffic Control program is a member of the FAA Academy's Air Traffic-Collegiate Training Initiative (AT-CTI) partnership program, which gives graduates a head start when beginning the FAA Academy training program.

[1:48:58 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE reviewed slide 6:

[Original punctuation provided.]

High-Demand Industries - Construction

- **Construction Management program on-line allowing Alaskans to up-skill and advance careers.**
- **Arctic and cold weather construction emphasis.**
- **Program qualifies graduates to bid for federal projects.**

MS. RUNGE stated that the intention of the Construction Management (CM) program is to supplement the education offered by other training providers in Alaska. The CM program offers both an Associate of Applied Science in Construction and a Bachelor of Science in Construction. Both degrees are virtual offerings and can be accessed from anywhere in the state.

[1:49:56 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE reviewed slide 7:

[Original punctuation provided.]

High-Demand Industries - Automotive

- **Automotive and Diesel Technology provides industry certified training.**
- **Practicum experience to increase skills and expedite hiring.**
- **Training partnerships with GM, Caterpillar, and local dealerships.**

MS. RUNGE said that the greatest challenge with the Automotive Technology and Diesel Technology programs is that students are often offered employment prior to the completion of their degree; therefore, the graduation rate for these programs is lower than it could be. However, the programs continue to meet the needs of the industry and students are finding successful career opportunities.

[1:50:47 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE reviewed slide 8:

[Original punctuation provided.]

High-Demand Industries - Culinary

- Culinary Arts program is Alaska's largest culinary training program
- Served state for 50 years.
- Professional chef training, front and back house management experience.
- Practical, hands-on experience through student-run restaurant.
- Developing JBER collaboration for military culinary personnel with civilian opportunities.

MS. RUNGE stated that the Culinary Arts program at UAA works in close partnership with Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) to ensure that military culinary personnel have access to these training opportunities as well. In addition, they partner with school districts in Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and several others across the state. They aim to create additional partnerships in the coming years.

[1:51:45 PM](#) MS. RUNGE said Debbie Craig, Dean of UAA's College of Health, to discuss [slides 9-11].

[1:52:08 PM](#)

DEBBIE CRAIG, Dean, College of Health (COH), University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), Anchorage, Alaska, Co-presented UAA Workforce Solutions for Alaska. She reviewed slide 9:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Alaska's Flagship Health University

- UAA College of Health statewide lead for health education in UA System.
- More than 40 health degree programs certificates to doctorates.
- Close partnerships with providers, health industry partners, and policymakers.
- Graduating hundreds of health workforce professionals annually
- Nursing training offered in-person at 15 locations across Alaska

MS. CRAIG detailed the various degrees and certifications available through the College of Health at UAA. Most of these programs are accredited. She explained that the success of these programs is largely due to the strong partnerships between providers, health industry partners, and policy makers. The most productive program is the nursing program, which is offered at 15 sites across the state.

[1:55:12 PM](#)

MS. CRAIG reviewed slide 10:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Growing Alaska's Health Workforce

- **Medical Doctor (MD)**-WWAMI Increasing cohort size from 20 to 30.
- **Medical Assisting (AAS)**-Designing statewide programming.
- **Dental Hygiene (BS)**-Increasing cohort size from 14 to 20
- **Social Work (MSW)**-Increasing cohort from 35 to 85 through multiple partners.

MS. CRAIG said that the Medical Doctor cohort size will increase incrementally over the next year, reaching 30 students by summer 2025. She noted that Medical Assisting is a high-demand field. There are five levels of medical assisting certification available in the state and UAA is the only school to offer the highest level of certification. This program is currently offered in Anchorage; however, they are working to create a distance program to expand availability to students throughout the state.

MS. CRAIG stated that the planned expansion of the Dental Hygiene program cohort is currently waiting on approval from the accrediting body. The Master's in Social Work (MSW) program expansion is possible because of a grant through Recover Alaska.

[1:57:06 PM](#)

MS. CRAIG reviewed slide 11:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Innovative Health Education Partnerships

- **WWAMI Medical Education** with *University of Washington*
- **MEDEX Physician Assistant** with *University of Washington*
- **Pharmacy Doctorate** with *Idaho State University*
- **Speech, Language Pathology** with *East Carolina University*
- **Occupational Therapy Doctorate** with *Creighton University*

MS. CRAIG spoke to the points contained in slide 11, noting that the acronym "WWAMI" refers to the five states that are a part of this program: Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho. These partnerships allow UAA's College of Health (COH) to offer a wide range of programs in order to meet the needs of Alaska's workforce.

[1:58:45 PM](#)

CHERYL SIEMERS, Director, Kenai Peninsula College (KPC), University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), Soldotna, Alaska, Co-presented UAA Workforce Solutions for Alaska. She reviewed slide 12:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Fueling Resource Industries

Kenai Peninsula College
University of Alaska Anchorage

- **Process Technology, AAS**
- **Industrial Process Instrument. (IPI), AAS**
- **Process Tech / IPI Dual Degree, AAS**
- **Petroleum Technology, Certificate**
- **Petroleum Production, Certificate**
- **Over 160 students are enrolled in Process Tech programs at KPC**

MS. SIEMERS stated that Kenai Peninsula College (KPC) offers many programs that provide training for the process industry. Graduates of this program work in a variety of areas including on the North Slope, on oil rigs, and in the seafood industry, among others. She explained that "process technology" refers to the ways in which raw materials are refined to create a more valuable product. She opined that these products are valuable to

both the local community and to the state of Alaska. KPC's program is tailored to the oil and gas industry. The program has graduated close to one thousand students. Most graduates have found employment in the oil and gas industry. KPC offers semester-long, one-year, and two-year certificates. These certificate programs help place students in critical jobs across the state. She noted that enrollment in these programs is growing.

[2:00:03 PM](#)

MS. SIEMERS reviewed slide 13:

[Original punctuation provided.]

KPC Process Tech Training

- **Hands-on training through simulation drills, instrumentation and electronics labs.**
- **Nationally Recognized Training Facilities**

MS. SIEMERS said that welcoming students to KPC's state-of-the-art process technology training facility is a highlight for faculty and staff. The facility offers hands-on training in simulators that replicate future workplace experience. She commented that the process technology training facility is like a small processing plant and is the only one of its kind in the state. Course instruction is tailored to meet the needs of students who are currently employed. Instructional delivery methods include lab intensives, online learning, in-person classes, and online simulations. KPC's course instructors have decades of industry experience.

[2:01:00 PM](#)

MS. SIEMERS reviewed slide 14:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Resource Industry Partners

- **KPC Process Industry grads are employed by companies including Hilcorp, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, Marathon, ASRC, Doyon and many others.**

MS. SIEMERS emphasized the importance of the open dialogue between KPC and industry partners. This dialogue allows industry

partners to suggest ways for KPC to improve its curriculum while also allowing students to communicate with future employers.

[2:01:49 PM](#)

MS. SIEMERS reviewed slide 15:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Industry Opportunities for Graduates

- **UA Programs Boost Alaska's Hire Rate**
- **94.2 percent of working Graduates are Alaska Residents**
- **Process Tech Graduates in high demand**
- **Excellent employment and earning opportunities in Alaska.**
- **UAA education creates employment opportunities for students to live and work in Alaska.**

MS. SIEMERS stated that graduates from process technology programs are in high demand. She explained that the information provided on slide 15 is taken from the 2023 University of Alaska Oil and Gas Workplace Report. She noted that nearly 90 percent of Process Technology graduates are employed in the state of Alaska within one year of graduation, with an average annual starting salary of \$80 thousand. KPC's goal is to provide students with up-to-date training in state-of-the-art facilities, along with robust partnerships that will enable them to fill critical workforce needs within the state.

[2:02:40 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE reviewed slide 16:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Expanding Opportunity

- **Meet students where they are in life.**
- **Stackable Credentials**
- **Credit for prior learning / apprenticeships**
- **UAA designated as a military friendly school 15 years in a row.**
- **Growing partnership with JBERR providing education and services to armed forces and families.**

MS. RUNGE stated that UAA's approach to expanding workforce development includes meeting students wherever they are in life. She explained that "stackable credentials" means students working towards a one-year certificate or an associate's degree can later use those same credits toward a bachelor's degree. This provides greater flexibility for students who may leave to join the workforce and later return to UAA to continue their education. UAA is federally recognized as a sponsor of apprenticeships with a multi-occupation approval. UAA is the first and only university in Alaska to hold this designation. In addition, UAA partners with Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) to create pathways for JBER personnel and their families to continue their education.

[2:04:16 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE reviewed slide 17:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Pathways to Careers

- College learning does not have to wait for college.
- Dual-enrollment earns both high school and college credit.
- Pathways exploring careers and on-ramps to accelerate learning.
- Middle College partnerships with local school districts serve thousands of students.

MS. RUNGE explained that UAA created the first Middle College partnership with the Matsu Borough at UAA's Chugiak-Eagle River facility. Following the success of this initial partnership, additional partnerships were established across the state. Students who take advantage of dual enrollment opportunities are more likely to graduate from high school and continue on to post-secondary education.

[2:05:31 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE reviewed slide 18:

[Original punctuation provided.]

STEM Pathways for Students

- **ANSEP nationally recognized for transformative educational opportunities for students since 1995.**

MS. RUNGE stated that since 1995 UAA has hosted the Alaska Native Science & Engineering Program (ANSEP). This program is nationally recognized and has received millions of dollars of federal funding. ANSEP supports transformative education for students in underrepresented groups. While the majority of students are from rural areas, programs are available in Anchorage and several other locations.

[2:06:24 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE reviewed slide 19:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Student Success - Michael Martinez

- **Longitudinal approach to education from K-to-PhD Professionals**

MS. RUNGE highlighted the success story of ANSEP student Michael Martinez. Mr. Martinez began by attending the ANSEP Acceleration Academy Dual enrollment high school program. He continued in the ANSEP university program and is now working toward a Doctor of Philosophy with the support of ANSEP. She expressed her hope that Mr. Martinez would one day hold a faculty position with UAA.

[2:06:51 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked for an update on the use of the additional \$5 million of funding that ANSEP received from the legislature during the 2023 legislative session.

[2:07:19 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE answered that, in part, this funding allowed students to attend the ANSEP Acceleration Academy. Students were able to travel to Anchorage and take advantage of opportunities that were not available online or through their local institutions. She offered to provide additional information to the committee.

[2:07:45 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE reviewed slide 20:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Results for Alaska

- More than 70,000 UAA alumni worldwide.
- Represented in all major industries and communities.
- 25 members of 33rd Alaska Legislature attended or worked at UAA.
- UAA alumni more likely to stay in Alaska.

MS. RUNGE said that the workforce in Alaska benefits when UAA graduates choose to remain in Alaska.

[2:08:43 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR noted that the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) has a veterinary medicine program that is a partnership between UAF and Colorado State. He pointed out that there is a shortage of veterinarians in the state of Alaska and asked if UAA offers veterinary programs.

[2:09:29 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE replied that the veterinary medicine program is offered only at UAF. She stated that UAA has a veterinary assisting program at the Matanuska-Susitna College campus in Palmer. Additionally, the board of regents has approved a new veterinary technician program. This will allow students in Alaska to access the full range of workforce positions in this field.

[2:10:08 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR stated his support for these programs. He added that veterinary technicians and veterinarians are needed both for pets and livestock. There are jobs available if the right people can receive the necessary training.

[2:10:35 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN stated that, in years past, there has been concern regarding the number of remedial courses offered at UAA. He asked if the university has considered increasing the admission requirements to avoid this. He explained that he has taught middle and high school students for 15 years on the Kenai Peninsula. Many students plan to attend post-secondary institutions; however, the quality of their high school work does not always reflect this desire. Thus, when these students matriculate at UAA, they need to take remedial courses prior to beginning their regular course work. He suggested that raising admissions requirements would give students and their families better guidance about what will be expected of them once they

matriculate at UAA. He stated that higher admissions requirements would enable high school teachers to incentivize their students to do well on their high school course work. Additionally, UAA could then offer fewer remedial courses.

[2:13:17 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE replied that this is an important question. She explained that because UAA is both a community college and a university system, it is entrusted with both missions. Therefore, while many programs have very high requirements (e.g. nursing and engineering), other programs have less rigorous admissions requirements. With respect to Developmental Studies courses, she explained that UAA has looked to community colleges in other states to see what has worked. Course acceleration, adjustments to student placement practices, and summer bootcamps are some of the ways that students are able reach the required level more quickly. Developmental Studies course enrollment has decreased in recent years as a result of these changes.

MS. RUNGE stated that a decreasing need for developmental studies courses means that the University is spending less money on these courses. She pointed out that, for students, having too many developmental studies courses on their transcript can have a negative impact. However, helping students do well in their first college course is part of the community college mission. She agreed that setting a high bar for students makes them more likely to work harder. She encourages discussion [between students, parents, and high school faculty] about the rigorousness of the field they would like to enter.

[2:15:30 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN said that this is good to know. He commented that communication between the university, high school faculty, guidance counselors, and parents is very important when setting expectations around college attendance.

[2:15:51 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN invited Mr. Raymond Weber to introduce himself for the record and answer questions regarding the aviation program at UAA. He asked if the pilot, air traffic controller, and aviation maintenance programs are able to graduate enough students to meet the current industry need in Alaska.

[2:16:42 PM](#)

RAYMOND WEBER, Dean of Community and Technical College, University of Alaska Anchorage, Anchorage, Alaska, Alaska, Alaska replied that the aviation program is not able to meet industry

demand at this time. Both the pilot program and aviation maintenance programs are at capacity, though they are in the process of expanding. He explained that the individuals UAA is seeking to hire as faculty are also being sought by the industry. The fleet is also being expanded. He noted that there are costs associated with these expansions and UAA is currently seeking funding. With respect to air traffic control, he explained that graduates must attend the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City. Graduates cannot always immediately return to their home state for employment. Upon graduation from the FAA Academy, the FAA places individuals in jobs around the country according to need. He said that there is an unprecedented need for air traffic controllers in all states. The FAA is considering alternative methods for job placement, including the option [for states] to hire directly from schools such as UAA. UAA's pass rate at the FAA Academy is one of the highest in the country. He stated that funding remains an obstacle to expansion and reiterated that both the pilot and maintenance programs are at capacity.

[2:19:05 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN asked how many more pilots, mechanics, and air traffic controllers UAA needs to train to meet the demand in Alaska.

[2:19:22 PM](#)

MR. WEBER replied he would provide an in-depth response to the committee.

[2:19:44 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR commented that the aviation facility at UAA is impressive and recommended that committee members take a tour of the facility.

[2:19:59 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN commented that the aviation program offers an incredible opportunity for individuals who would like to work in this field.

[2:20:14 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN asked Ms. Craig to discuss nursing program enrollment trends and concerns.

[2:20:40 PM](#)

MS. CRAIG acknowledged that this is a concern across the state. She explained that in May of 2023, the nursing program did not have enough applicants to fill the spots available. This was

limited to the Anchorage program. To address the decrease in enrollment, the school reached out to potential applicants through various avenues and was able to fill most available spots before the fall program began. She explained that nursing programs across the country are seeing a decline in enrollment and offered her understanding that this has not happened since the 1980s. This decline may be a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. UAA has increased recruitment and marketing which will potentially increase enrollment for future cohorts. The program has over 460 full-time nursing students and 600 students enrolled in the pre-nursing program. While the Anchorage enrollment numbers have decreased, there has been a 25 percent increase in the number of students in rural sites. These programs typically accept anywhere from 4-8 students annually or biannually. She stated that she is unable to give a specific reason for the national downturn in nursing school applications at this time.

[2:23:48 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN asked for information about the licensing process for students who graduate from the nursing program at UAA.

[2:24:15 PM](#)

MS. CRAIG replied that the licensing board works diligently with graduates to enable a smooth transition from graduation to working in the state of Alaska. 95 percent of UAAs nursing program graduates seek licensure in Alaska. However, there is some concern regarding licensure of traveling nurses. During the Covid-19 pandemic, nationwide nurse shortages increased the need for traveling nurses. However, licensing delays caused some traveling nurses to go elsewhere rather than coming to Alaska. She briefly discussed the Nurse Licensure Compact, which would create an agreement allowing nurses to travel and work within a select group of states with similar licensing requirements. If approved, nurses traveling between these states would not need to become licensed in each state individually. The Alaska Hospital and Healthcare Association (AHHA) is a proponent of the compact. She expressed her understanding that the Alaska licensing board is in support of this change.

[2:26:22 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN asked Ms. Siemers to tell the committee about the millwright training offered at UAA.

[2:26:58 PM](#)

MS. SIEMERS explained that millwright training is offered through Prince William Sound College and deferred to Ms. Runge for additional information.

[2:27:28 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE stated that millwright training is offered on the Valdez campus of Prince William Sound College. This is a short-term program, taking approximately one year to complete. Most students work and live locally due to the hands-on nature of the program. She explained that they would like to expand the program; however, they are limited by the size of the current facility. It is difficult to find a larger location in Valdez, where space is limited. Despite the small program size, the program produces a significant number of graduates each year.

[2:28:21 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN sought additional questions from the committee. There being no further questions, he thanked Dr. Runge and UAA faculty members for their presentation.

[2:29:05 PM](#)

At ease

SB 173-AUTHORIZE HANDGUNS SCHOOL EMPLOYEE/VOLUNT

[2:30:46 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 173, "An Act requiring school districts to grant qualified persons an assigned duty to carry a concealed handgun on school grounds under certain conditions; relating to standards, training, and continuing education in firearms training for qualified persons granted an assigned duty to carry a concealed handgun on school grounds; relating to communication of school districts with state and local law enforcement; and relating to school crisis response plans."

[2:31:05 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced Senator Hughes and invited her to introduce SB 173.

[2:31:17 PM](#)

SENATOR SHELLEY HUGHES, District M, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, speaking as sponsor of SB 173, moved to slide 2 and shared her belief that SB 173 addresses one of the most important concerns before the Legislature.

[Original punctuation provided.]

Purpose

To save lives during an active shooter incident on school grounds by providing an immediate response by an on-site, highly-trained, stable, responsible individual as an augmentation to local law enforcement.

SENATOR HUGHES stated that front-end measures, such as providing support for "mentally troubled" students and individuals and extra security measures at school facilities, are essential. However, back-end measures are crucial for times when front-end measures are not enough. This is especially true in Alaska, where many schools are located in remote areas that do not have a local police force. Referring to a conversation with the Commissioner of Public Safety, she shared that it can sometimes take law enforcement 3 to 5 days to reach remote villages in inclement weather. SB 173 is a stopgap that would address this issue. She said that she has spoken with parents, teachers, and students who have expressed concern that the question is not "if" but "when" an active shooter will enter their school. She noted that while active shooter rampages are not common, they are occurring more frequently.

[2:34:04 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES indicated that this is not a new issue and brought attention to the shooting at Bethel Regional High School in 1997. Following the 2021 school shooting at Oxford High School in Michigan, she was approached by a former Bethel high school faculty member who taught at the Bethel high school when the [Bethel High School] shooting occurred. He shared his belief that concealed carry on school grounds would be an effective deterrent for active-shooter incidents. Pointing to the many active-shooter incidents that have occurred across the country over the past two decades, she suggested early intervention, school preparation, and concealed carry could have reduced the number of incidents and loss of life.

[2:35:58 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES brought attention to two individuals who had hoped to testify in support of SB 173 today: a school district employee whose identity must remain confidential but who has provided written testimony and the parent of a child killed in the Parkland school shooting who will not be able to testify due to a family emergency.

SENATOR HUGHES read the following anonymous testimony:

I cannot disclose my name for confidentiality for my safety and the school district where I work. I am here to lend my voice to speak on behalf of school employees who currently carry a concealed handgun on school grounds in support of SB 173. I have a master's in nursing leadership and management and a master's in business administration. I am a Certified School Nurse in the state where I practice. I currently work as a district school nurse, overseeing and providing care for staff and students from preschool through age 22 throughout multiple campus locations. In addition to my role as a Registered Nurse, I am a member of my district's armed response team.

[2:37:55 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced invited testimony on SB 173.

[2:38:34 PM](#)

DONNA ANTHONY, Chief of Police, Chickaloon Tribal Police Department, Chickaloon, Alaska, testified in support of SB 173. She is a lifelong resident of Alaska currently residing in Palmer. She has over 20 years of experience in law enforcement and security. She is the owner of Point-Blank Firearms and Defense Training. She is a training counselor and certified firearms instructor for the National Rifle Association (NRA), United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA), and the National Law Enforcement Firearms Instructors Association (NLEFIA), among others. She shared that she has experience presenting on this topic at a variety of venues related to active shooter concerns and has helped create safety videos on this topic.

MS. ANTHONY stated that her passion for school safety began during her time as a deputy sheriff in Ohio. At that time, she was a certified School Resource Officer (SRO) with the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO). She explained that the protocols for dealing with active-shooter incidents changed after the 1999 shooting at Columbine high school in Littleton, Colorado. While serving as an SRO, she learned of a potential shooting at a local middle school. This was due to a tip reported via the Safer Ohio School Tip Line. An investigation led to the seizure of guns and detailed plans from the student. The individual was arrested and placed in Juvenile Detention. It was later discovered that the student had been the victim of bullying. The tip line also allowed her to investigate

and stop a bomb threat. In this case, the student had a troubled past and a history of making pipe bombs.

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MS. ANTHONY acknowledged that some people may question the necessity of arming staff at schools in Alaska. In response to this question, she provided a list of active shooter incidents and threats that have occurred in Alaska. She expressed concern regarding law enforcement's inability to quickly access remote locations. In addition, remote villages often have Village Public Safety Officers (VPSO) who are not armed and therefore are unprepared to respond to these incidents. While larger cities in Alaska have Police Departments with SROs who can respond quickly, remote villages do not. She referred to a 2020 report by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) which stated that 98 percent of active-shooter incidents occur in gun-free zones. She pointed out that schools without an SRO or armed security are gun-free zones and opined that it is necessary to "harden" these schools. Additionally, the FBI reports that 68 percent of active-shooter incidents end before police arrive. These incidents often end in under five minutes, with many incidents lasting two minutes or less. Even in cities with armed law enforcement, response time is a concern. She concluded that having an SRO or trained, armed security in schools would help to address this issue in both rural and urban areas.

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SENATOR DUNBAR asked what kind of training would be needed to qualify someone as a "highly trained, stable, responsible individual." He questioned whether training would be limited to what is needed for a concealed-carry permit or whether additional training would be required and asked about the length and expense of the necessary training.

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MS. ANTHONY replied that every state is different. She shared her understanding that in general, armed security who is not law enforcement must have appropriate training and a background check. For law enforcement, a mental background check is also done. She opined that individuals working as armed security in schools need more than concealed carry training. It is her understanding that additional training requirements have been included in SB 173.

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SENATOR HUGHES explained that the initial training would be a four-day training specific to the school setting. She pointed

out that for law enforcement, SROs must complete an additional school-specific training prior to beginning their work in schools because of the unique aspects of working with children. Local school districts will determine any additional training requirements.

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JIM IRVINE, President, Buckeye Firearms Foundation, Faster Saves Lives Director, Cleveland, Ohio, Gave invited testimony in support of SB 173. He is an airline pilot by trade and has been studying "active killer" events for the past 20 years. He has helped train thousands of school staff through the Faster Saves Lives program over the past 10 years. He stated that to end school shootings and save lives, three things are needed:

- A law that encourages and allows schools to adopt best practices, including armed staff of trained individuals
- Funding so that staff can attend training and schools can purchase equipment
- School administrators must embrace their obligation to protect the children in their care and custody

MR. IRVINE referred to a recent school shooting in Iowa, stating his belief that, had the principal received training and been armed, he would still be alive. He went on to discuss the school shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, stating that while the reports from this shooting are gut-wrenching, they are not surprising. He suggested that it is reasonable to be critical of law enforcement in this case. However, there was time between the call to emergency services and the first gunshots that could have been taken advantage of, had staff members been trained and armed. He stated that criticisms of the police response are not unique to this event, pointing out that police do not often deal with active killer events. He opined that it is not the job of the police to save students; rather, it is the obligation of school faculty to protect students who are in their custody. He commented that most schools in the United States, including Robb Elementary School, have a culture of complacency, adding that the idea that "it would never happen here" results in a lack of preparedness. He stated that policies and procedures are needed for when these incidents inevitably occur.

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MR. IRVINE said that a lack of understanding causes the public to disagree with plans to train and arm school staff. He opined that, once adopted in Alaska, some schools will readily adopt the changes while others will take a "wait and see" approach. He stated his belief that, over time, more schools will come on board and positive changes will occur. He shared several stories from Ohio to illustrate how armed school staff working with law enforcement is beneficial. He commented that, if passed, SB 173 would one day result in a critical incident review that applauds school faculty for being prepared, working together with emergency responders, and saving lives.

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STEVE ROSE, Superintendent, Russia Local School, Russia, Ohio, gave invited testimony in support of SB 173. He said that he has worked in his school district for 15 years and has two children attending school there. Since the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, he has been working with the school district to develop a security plan to keep students safe. This includes having armed staff in the building. He explained that Russia, Ohio is a small village that does not have a police department. In the case of an emergency, it may take emergency responders and the county sheriff up to 20 minutes to arrive. He said that in an active shooter situation seconds count, adding that 20 minutes is too long. In 2013, the district implemented an armed response plan. He described the training that staff completed, which included training in firearms, active shooter protocols, and first aid. They also learned how to safely interact with law enforcement during an emergency. Staff attended lessons at the shooting range and received additional training on school grounds.

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MR. ROSE commented that, while they are not police officers, they are well-trained in how to stop an active threat. In addition to training armed staff, they have secured school entry points, added protective film to doors, set up tip lines, and trained staff to recognize potential red flags. He stated that the armed response team is the last line of defense. All members of the armed response team are volunteers. They each have a conceal and carry license, have completed over 30 hours of training, and have fired over a thousand rounds of ammunition prior to being approved for the program. Each member of the team must attend annual training and qualify on the Ohio Peace Officer qualification test annually. He said that members of the armed response team are held to the same standards as Ohio Police officers. Only a small percentage of faculty members are

on the armed response team. He compared this job to that of a school bus driver who is responsible for the safety of students while they ride the bus and stated that he takes the same responsibility for the safety of students while they are at school. He reiterated his support for armed staff as part of school security measures.

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SENATOR DUNBAR asked what percentage of teachers chose to take the training.

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MR. ROSE answered that there are 50 employees in the district, 3 of whom are on the response team. None of the response team members are teachers.

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SENATOR DUNBAR asked how much it cost the district to train one person.

MR. ROSE replied that the Sheriff's department provided the initial training free of charge. The second training was through the FASTER program and the district received grants to pay for that training. The district was responsible for purchasing ammunition and other tools needed for the training.

SENATOR DUNBAR noted that SB 173 says, "has completed any training required by the district's insurance policy to be eligible for coverage." He asked how training armed staff has impacted the insurance policy in Mr. Rose's district.

MR. ROSE answered that, initially, the district needed to purchase law enforcement insurance for approximately two thousand dollars. However, they have since been included under the district's Public Employment Risk Reduction Program (PERRP) policy at no extra charge. He added that they have multi-million-dollar liability coverage.

[3:01:38 PM](#)

DIANNA MULLER, Member, Women for Gun Rights, Las Vegas, Nevada, testified by invitation in support of SB 173. She is a retired 22-year veteran of the Tulsa Police Department, a world and national champion competition shooter, and the founder of Women for Gun Rights. She stated that she has experience with violence and experience with firearms. She reasoned that all people want safety for themselves and for their families; however, there are different ways of achieving this goal. She pointed out that, in

the wake of mass-shootings, many propose gun-control. She opined that gun control is a proven failure and said that 94 percent of mass-shootings occur in gun-free zones. Highlighting the shootings at schools in Uvalde, Texas and Parkland, Florida, she pointed out that the US Supreme Court recently ruled that police officers do not have a duty to respond to active-shooter incidents.

MS. MULLER opined that schools have a duty to care for the children who are in their custody. She said that schools typically do a good job addressing domestic abuse concerns. School administrators must apply this same vigor when preparing for and protecting students from violence at school. She surmised that many school staff already carry firearms. She suggested that these individuals should be able to conceal-carry on school grounds. She said that school employees in other states have been trained and authorized to carry firearms on school grounds for decades. She commented that this provides the students in those states with additional protection. She asserted that schools need to reevaluate their active-killer preparedness protocols and added that schools should be allowed to authorize trained individuals to carry firearms as a part of these protocols.

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DEBORAH RIDDLE, Division Operations Manager, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, reported on the fiscal note for SB 173. She stated that the DEED fiscal note for SB 173 is zero. SB 173 directs individual school districts to take on policy creation. There are several entities that the districts can utilize for policy creation. DEED also has staff on its health and safety team who can assist.

SENATOR DUNBAR pointed out that SB 173 requires districts to pay to train the individuals who choose to take on this role. He inferred that this would result in a cost to the district and asked Ms. Riddle to clarify that this would not cost the state anything.

MS. RIDDLE replied that it would not cost the state anything.

SENATOR HUGHES said that she encourages the creation of a fiscal note that would offset costs incurred by school districts as a result of the training requirement.

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SENATOR DUNBAR stated his agreement. He would like to hear from school districts regarding the estimated costs. These costs can then be built into SB 173. He pointed out that SB 173 uses the word "shall" rather than "may", which will result in an added cost for the school districts.

[3:07:15 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON expressed appreciation for the testimony offered from out-of-state individuals. She asked if the sponsor of SB 173 has had conversations with Alaska stakeholders such as Anchorage Police Department (APD), Department of Public Safety (DPS), Alaska Police Standards Council (APSC), and the Alaska Association of Chiefs of Police (AACOP).

SENATOR HUGHES replied yes. She said that she has spoken with law enforcement and met with DPS. She noted that SB 173 does not mandate law enforcement but does require districts to provide detailed information to law enforcement. There is a DPS fiscal note due to the potential increase in conceal-carry permit applications. She welcomed further discussions with law enforcement agencies.

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SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON replied that while she appreciates this response, she believes these conversations are needed. She expressed that she would like to know what the aforementioned organizations think about SB 173.

SENATOR DUNBAR noted that the individuals who testified spoke about having the option to arm staff. He stated his understanding that currently, schools in Alaska have the option to arm staff and that SB 173 would change this to a requirement. He asked if this is correct.

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SENATOR HUGHES replied yes. She explained that [school superintendents] currently set the policy [outlining the procedures for employing armed staff on school premises] and suggested that districts have been reluctant to implement these policies. She reasoned that this is because Alaskans want to be sure that the armed individuals are stable, responsible, and highly trained. SB 173 addresses this concern by including this language. She contrasted this with Utah's law that allows anyone who is licensed to conceal-carry to do so on school grounds with no restrictions. She emphasized the importance of student safety and pointed out that SB 173 includes physical and mental health requirements that must meet or exceed those of the Alaska Police

Standards Council (APSC). APSC requires that individuals pass a general health check as well as a psychological evaluation. She reiterated that arming school staff has long been an option for districts; however, none has chosen to do so.

SENATOR HUGHES reiterated concerns regarding law enforcement response times and the increase in school shootings across the country. She stated that if an active shooter event occurs and students and/or school staff are harmed this would be a travesty. The legislature should consider this issue before an active shooter event occurs. It is important to strengthen front-end protocols. However, four out of five shootings have no advance warning. She asserted that it is only a matter of time before an active-shooter event occurs in Alaska.

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SENATOR HUGHES said that regardless of one's beliefs about gun-control and/or the second amendment, people should be able to agree that schools need someone on-site who can stop an active shooter. She added that this is an uncomfortable but necessary conversation. The legislature must create a policy because Alaska is more vulnerable than other states when it comes to potential school violence.

CHAIR BJORKMAN thanked the invited testifiers and apologized for running out of time to take public testimony at this hearing. He reminded the public that they can submit written testimony via email to slac@akleg.gov.

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There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Bjorkman adjourned the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting at 3:15 p.m.