

SENATE BILL NO. 169

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA
THIRTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY SENATOR TOBIN

Introduced: 4/11/25

Referred: State Affairs, Finance

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

1 **"An Act establishing the welcoming Alaska office; establishing the welcoming Alaska**
2 **center; establishing the Welcoming Alaska Advisory Committee; repealing the office of**
3 **citizenship assistance; and providing for an effective date."**

4 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

5 * **Section 1.** AS 23.05 is amended by adding new sections to read:

6 **Sec. 23.05.131. Welcoming Alaska office.** (a) The welcoming Alaska office is
7 established in the office of the commissioner. The office shall

8 (1) provide to new immigrants and newcomers employment
9 information, referrals to employment services, including job placement services, and
10 information about how to use labor unions, administrative agencies, and court actions
11 to pursue claims or charges of job discrimination, illegal termination of employment,
12 sexual harassment, and unsafe working conditions;

13 (2) consult with stakeholders, including state agencies and local
14 governments, to identify strategies to reduce licensing and other employment barriers

1 for new immigrants and newcomers;

2 (3) use the education and experience of new immigrants and
3 newcomers to benefit the economy of the state;

4 (4) contract with other state agencies to develop and administer
5 programs or services that promote entrance into and mobility within the workforce for
6 new immigrants and newcomers;

7 (5) consult with stakeholders, including state agencies and local
8 governments, to develop and implement a statewide strategy to support businesses in
9 recruiting and retaining workers who are new immigrants and newcomers;

10 (6) advise the commissioner on

11 (A) improving employment opportunities for new immigrants
12 and newcomers;

13 (B) preventing employment discrimination against new
14 immigrants and newcomers;

15 (C) cooperating with state and federal agencies to accomplish
16 the office's mission;

17 (D) supporting the economic and social integration of new
18 immigrants and newcomers; and

19 (E) reducing the exploitation of new immigrants and
20 newcomers;

21 (7) subject to appropriation, offer grants to support the economic and
22 social integration of new immigrants and newcomers;

23 (8) subject to appropriation, offer grants to state and local government
24 agencies, community-based organizations, and nonprofits that provide individualized
25 support to foreign workers;

26 (9) serve as a convener for community-based organizations serving
27 new immigrants and newcomers;

28 (10) design and implement strategies and programs to make the state a
29 more welcoming place for new immigrants and newcomers;

30 (11) serve as a point of contact for all state agencies regarding issues
31 affecting new immigrants and newcomers;

1 (12) subject to appropriation, establish the welcoming Alaska center
2 under AS 25.05.134 and operate a toll-free multilingual hotline for referral of services;

3 (13) coordinate with departments and nonprofit organizations to assist
4 new immigrants and newcomers in improving quality-of-life issues, including access
5 to business opportunities, education, employment, housing, healthcare, and other
6 services;

7 (14) subject to appropriation, assist political subdivisions with fees and
8 other costs associated with visa applications, recruitment, and housing support for new
9 immigrants and newcomers;

10 (15) research and analyze economic and demographic trends to better
11 serve new immigrants and newcomers;

12 (16) coordinate and establish best practices for language access
13 initiatives for all state agencies;

14 (17) serve as an information clearinghouse on information regarding
15 new immigrants and newcomers; and

16 (18) make policy recommendations to the governor and the legislature
17 on issues affecting new immigrants and newcomers.

18 (b) The office may contract with other organizations as appropriate to further
19 the goals of the office.

20 (c) The governor shall appoint an individual to serve as the executive director
21 of the office. The executive director is in the partially exempt service under AS 39.25
22 (State Personnel Act).

23 (d) The department shall adopt regulations necessary to implement this
24 section.

25 **Sec. 23.05.132. Welcoming Alaska liaison.** (a) Each principal department in
26 the executive branch shall designate one staff member to serve as a liaison between
27 the department and the office.

28 (b) A liaison shall

29 (1) disseminate information about services offered by the department
30 that are available to new immigrants and newcomers, department staff, the office, and
31 the public;

1 (2) communicate with the office on issues affecting new immigrants
2 and newcomers;

3 (3) when applicable, coordinate between the office, the liaison's
4 department, and professional boards within the liaison's department to assist the office
5 with license applications from new immigrants and newcomers.

6 **Sec. 23.05.133. Welcoming Alaska Advisory Committee.** (a) The
7 Welcoming Alaska Advisory Committee is established in the department and shall be
8 staffed and administered by the office. The advisory committee consists of the
9 following nine members:

10 (1) one nonvoting member who is a member of the house of
11 representatives appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives;

12 (2) one nonvoting member who is a member of the senate appointed by
13 the president of the senate;

14 (3) seven voting members appointed by the governor as follows:

15 (A) a representative from a nonprofit organization that provides
16 employment or language services to new immigrants and newcomers;

17 (B) a representative from a tribal nonprofit organization;

18 (C) a representative from the Alaska Council of School
19 Administrators;

20 (D) a representative from the business community;

21 (E) a representative from a nonprofit legal services agency that
22 provides services to immigrants and refugees;

23 (F) a representative from the criminal justice system;

24 (G) a member of the public.

25 (b) The committee shall

26 (1) assist the office with developing recommendations for policies,
27 procedures, regulations, and legislation to help ensure state government and state
28 programs are accessible and responsive to the needs of new immigrants and
29 newcomers;

30 (2) work with the office to monitor the work of state agencies to
31 include and retain new immigrants and newcomers in state programs;

1 (3) conduct public meetings, as requested by the governor or the
2 office, for the public to comment and make suggestions on attracting to and retaining
3 in the state new immigrants and newcomers and improving the employment
4 opportunities, inclusion in civic matters, and community connections of new
5 immigrants and newcomers;

6 (4) conduct studies, on request of the governor or the office, on issues
7 affecting new immigrants and newcomers;

8 (5) advise the office on ways to increase outreach to new immigrants
9 and newcomers; and

10 (6) review budget requests of the office and recommend to the
11 commissioner amounts for appropriations to the office.

12 (c) A voting member of the committee appointed by the governor serves at the
13 pleasure of the governor for staggered terms of four years until reappointed or
14 replaced. If a vacancy occurs among the voting members, the governor shall appoint a
15 member for the unexpired portion of the term.

16 (d) Voting members of the committee shall elect a member to serve as chair.

17 (e) A majority of the committee constitutes a quorum.

18 (f) The committee shall meet at least twice a year. A meeting may be held at
19 the call of the chair, by request of a majority of the committee, or at the request of the
20 executive director of the office.

21 (g) A member of the committee receives no salary but is entitled to per diem
22 and travel expenses authorized for boards and commissions under AS 39.20.180.

23 **Sec. 23.05.134. Welcoming Alaska center.** (a) Subject to appropriation, the
24 office shall establish a welcoming Alaska center in one or more communities to
25 provide virtual and in-person information and assistance for new immigrants and
26 newcomers. The office shall prioritize establishing a welcoming Alaska center in an
27 existing state office facility or on a University of Alaska campus that is easily
28 accessible and conveniently located.

29 (b) A welcoming Alaska center shall provide the following services to new
30 immigrants and newcomers:

31 (1) English and Alaska Native language instruction;

- 1 (2) employment services and training; and
 2 (3) assistance with access to government programs and community
 3 services.

4 **Sec. 23.05.135. Definitions.** In AS 23.05.131 - 23.05.135,

5 (1) "newcomer" means an individual who moved to the state from
 6 another state in the preceding 36 months;

7 (2) "new immigrant" means an individual, or the child of an individual,
 8 who has arrived, or will arrive, to the state as an immigrant or refugee;

9 (3) "office" means the welcoming Alaska office established under
 10 AS 23.05.131.

11 * **Sec. 2.** AS 39.25.120(c) is amended by adding a new paragraph to read:

12 (22) the executive director of the welcoming Alaska office.

13 * **Sec. 3.** AS 23.05.125 is repealed.

14 * **Sec. 4.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to
 15 read:

16 STUDY; REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE. The welcoming Alaska office
 17 established under AS 23.05.131 shall conduct a study to determine immigration opportunities
 18 in the state, establish goals for the welcoming Alaska office, and develop performance
 19 indicators to measure progress for the welcoming Alaska office. The study must include input
 20 from employers in the state. The welcoming Alaska office shall prepare a report explaining
 21 the findings from the study and submit the report by July 1, 2027, to the senate secretary and
 22 the chief clerk of the house of representatives and notify the legislature that the report is
 23 available.

24 * **Sec. 5.** This Act takes effect July 1, 2026.