

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

May 9, 2025
8:07 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Rebecca Himschoot, Co-Chair
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair
Representative Maxine Dibert
Representative Ted Eischeid
Representative Jubilee Underwood
Representative Rebecca Schwanke
Representative Bill Elam

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 25

Supporting and encouraging the continued recruitment and retention of international educators on J-1 and H-1B visas in the state.

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 190

"An Act relating to the insurance tax education credit; relating to the income tax education credit; relating to the oil or gas producer education credit; relating to the property tax education credit; relating to the mining business education credit; relating to the fisheries business education credit; relating to the fisheries resource landing tax education credit; renaming the day care assistance program the child care assistance program; relating to the child care assistance program and the child care grant program; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HJR 25

SHORT TITLE: INTERNATIONAL TEACHER VISAS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) MINA

05/07/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
05/07/25 (H) EDC
05/07/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
05/07/25 (H) Scheduled but Not Heard
05/09/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 190

SHORT TITLE: CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE; TAX CREDITS

SPONSOR(S): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

04/14/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/14/25 (H) EDC, L&C
05/09/25 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE GENEVIEVE MINA
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HJR 25 to the committee.

DR. MADELINE AGUILLARD
Superintendent, Kuspuk School District
Aniak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony on HJR 25.

MCKERWIN ACDAL, Principal Teacher
Crow Village Sam School
Chuathbaluk, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony on HJR 25.

DR. LISA PARADY, Executive Director
Alaska Council of School Administrators
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony on HJR 25.

JENNIFER SCHMITZ, Director
Alaska Education Recruitment & Retention Center, Alaska Council
of School Administrators
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 25.

DR. DALE EBCAS, Special Education & Lead Teacher
Kuspuk School District
Kalskag, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 25.

}AIMEE BUSHNELL, Legislative Liaison
Department of Revenue
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of House Rules by request of the governor, prime sponsor, presented HB 190 to the committee.

LEAH VAN KIRK, Health Care Policy Advisor
Department of Health & Social Services
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of House Rules by request of the governor, prime sponsor, presented HB 190 to the committee.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:07:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:07 a.m. Representatives Eischeid, Himschoot, Dibert, Elam, Schwanke, Underwood, and Story were present at the call to order.

HJR 25-INTERNATIONAL TEACHER VISAS

[8:09:57 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 25, "Supporting and encouraging the continued recruitment and retention of international educators on J-1 and H-1B visas in the state."

[8:10:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GENEVIEVE MINA, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HJR 25 to the committee. She paraphrased the sponsor statement for HJR 25 [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Alaska faces difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers, especially in rural and remote communities. HJR 25 acknowledges the essential role and contributions of international educators working under J-1 and H-1B visas towards educational stability and high-quality instruction for Alaska's students. While the state works to grow our own educators and

recruit teachers from out-of-state, many school districts across Alaska have turned to international recruitment as a practical, effective solution. School districts in western Alaska, Kodiak, and the North Slope have relied heavily on international educators to fill school vacancies. In some cases, over 60% of teaching staff have been filled by international hires. These educators not only bring professional expertise, but a strong commitment to their new community, and enrich the classroom with global perspectives.

However, despite their vital role, international educators often face challenges related to immigration status, uncertainty in visa durations, limited job mobility, and delays in paperwork processing. These obstacles threaten the stability of the very schools they support and jeopardize the state's ability to provide consistent, high-quality education.

HJR 25 urges the Alaska Legislature, local school districts, higher education institutions, and federal leaders to recognize and support international educators as an essential part of Alaska's educational workforce. These actions include policies that provide greater visa security, improved mobility, and pathways to long-term stability for educators on J-1 and H-1B visas. The resolution also fosters collaboration among stakeholders to create sustainable strategies for recruiting and retaining skilled international teachers.

Along with American teachers in Alaska's school districts, international educators are valued professionals whose dedication, resilience, and contributions are vital to the future of Alaska's education system. Their contributions extend far beyond the classroom, bolstering local economies, and supporting community life. By supporting this resolution, the State of Alaska affirms our commitment to ensuring every student has access to the quality education they deserve, no matter where they live.

[8:13:45 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:13 a.m. to 8:14 a.m.

[8:14:50 AM](#)

DR. MADELINE AGUILLARD, Superintendent, Kuspuk School District, gave invited testimony on HJR 25. She explained the benefits of a school district being able to hire international educators and said that over 60 percent of the teachers in the Kuspuk School District are international teachers. She said that the biggest challenge in hiring a person with a J-1 or H1-B visa is the federal immigration system and emphasized the stress that the federal immigration system places on both the students and school districts around Alaska. She shared a series of achievements that international teachers have made and emphasized the importance of their role in the communities they work in.

[8:19:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SCHWANKE asked why an international teacher might not have an immigration sponsor.

DR. AGUILLARD answered that a series of complaints and stories about living conditions in rural Alaska lead federal agencies to only sponsor J-1 visa teachers on Alaska's road system.

[8:22:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked if access to health care plays a role in the placement of an international teacher.

DR. AGUILLARD confirmed Co-Chair Himschoot's understanding that access to healthcare plays a determining factor in the placement of an international educator.

[8:24:12 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Dr. Aguillard to elaborate on the training that an international educator might receive versus that of a domestic teacher.

DR. AGUILLARD shared her experience in working as an international teacher in the Philippines and explained that there are differences in the implementations of the theoretical teaching methods around the world, though the core curriculum remains the same.

[8:26:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EISCHEID asked if international teachers are experiencing a "learning curve" to classroom management in Alaska and asked what the average level of experience is with international educators.

DR. AGUILLARD answered that classroom management is a challenge of international educators and explained that her school district has implemented a positive behavior intervention system (PBIS) as a means to effectively address the challenges of classroom management. She shared her anecdote that international educators are often maxing out the Kuspuk School District's pay scales.

[8:29:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked where international educators who are teaching in Alaska received their education.

DR. AGUILLARD answered that all of the international teachers in her school district received their education in the Philippines.

[8:31:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DIBERT asked what the workload of J-1 visa teachers is compared to other domestic or international educators.

DR. AGUILLARD explained that the workload of an international educator often is a product of the learning curve to teaching in Alaska.

[8:34:13 AM](#)

MCKERWIN ACDAL, Principal Teacher, Crow Village Sam School, gave invited testimony on HJR 25. He read from a prepared statement [not included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Good morning, Madam co-chair and esteemed members of the committee. For the record, my name is Mc Kerwin Niño M. Acdal. I am the Principal/Teacher, teaching K-5 Multigrade Class at Kuspuk School District. My school, Crow Village Sam School is in Chuathbaluk, Alaska, within the Kuskokwim region.

I am here today to speak in support of House Joint Resolution Number 25.

This is my 14th year of teaching, with four of those years spent in remote Alaska on a J1 visa. During this time, I have witnessed the remarkable and transformative impact that international educators have on our educational experiences and the communities we serve.

International teachers introduce not only diverse perspectives and innovative teaching methods but also a global mindset that is essential in today's interconnected world. We made our lessons engaging and foster a sense of curiosity among students about different cultures and worldviews. By embracing this understanding in our classrooms, we prepare our students to become more empathetic and culturally aware individuals—qualities that are vital for their future success.

International teachers play a crucial role in addressing the significant teacher shortage in Alaska, especially in remote areas. Many schools across the state face challenges in attracting qualified teachers to work in these locations, and international educators step in to fill these gaps with unique skills, expertise, experience, and commitment. Throughout my time in the classroom, I have witnessed the positive impact of a diverse teaching staff. Students become more engaged, attendance rates rise, and academic performance improves when they feel supported and when their teachers remain in the community for longer periods.

I also want to highlight how international teachers contribute to community engagement. We participate in local events, share our culture, and connect with families, which strengthens the bond between the school and the community. This connection fosters a sense of belonging and encourages parental involvement, which is crucial for student success.

My time in Alaska has provided me with the incredible opportunity to learn about the Yup'ik way of life and culture. Engaging with the local community and participating in cultural events has enriched my understanding of their traditions, values, and

perspectives. For instance, I have learned about the significance of storytelling in Yup'ik culture, which emphasizes resilience. This cultural immersion has not only informed my teaching practices but has also allowed me to incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices into the classroom, fostering a deeper connection between students and their heritage. By doing so, we create a place where students feel valued and empowered, and this enhances their overall learning experience. Supporting the hiring of international teachers can further enrich this cultural exchange, enabling us to continue learning and growing together as a community.

In conclusion, I respectfully urge the committee to support this resolution, as it presents a vital opportunity to improve our educational system in Alaska. By advocating for the hiring and retention of international teachers, we are prioritizing the quality of education our students receive and ensuring they have access to a rich and diverse learning environment. This advocacy is a commitment to my students' right to a high-quality education that prepares them for a successful future. Their potential is boundless, and it is our duty to provide them with dedicated educators who can help them reach that potential. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I eagerly anticipate the positive changes this resolution will bring to our schools and communities.

[8:39:26 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked Mr. Acdal if he and other international educators receive recurrent training on the implementation of the Alaska READS act of 2021.

MR. ACDAL answered that he was one of the co-authors for the implementation guide of the Alaska READS act of 2021.

[8:40:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked Mr. Acdal how his experience in teaching in the Philippines has been different to his experience in teaching in rural Alaska.

MR. ACDAL explained that it has been very challenging to teach all levels of K-5 instruction to all students at once in Alaska,

while in the Philippines he would have only one class of one age group learning one core subject.

[8:42:06 AM](#)

DR. LISA PARADY, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators, gave invited testimony on HJR 25. She said that school districts across Alaska are experiencing success in filling faculty gaps with international educators. She explained that students, staff, and teachers all have extremely positive things to say about the international teachers that serve rural Alaska and emphasized the importance of the role that the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) has played in facilitating the recruitment and retention of international educators. She highlighted the viability of recruiting international educators as a way to address the challenges of teacher recruitment and retention overall and explained that international hiring helps relieve an immediate need while a school district may hire other high quality domestic educators. She urged the committee's support of HJR 25.

[8:48:25 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on HJR 25.

[8:49:10 AM](#)

JENNIFER SCHMITZ, Director, Alaska Education Recruitment & Retention Center, Alaska Council of School Administrators, testified in support of HJR 25. She explained that international educators are of immense value to both students and community members alike and said that the hiring of international students is a great method to counter the challenges of domestic or in-state teacher recruitment and retention. She urged the committee's support of HJR 25.

[8:52:37 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked Director Schmitz if the work that she is doing applies to international teaching programs around the world, not just in Alaska.

DIRECTOR SCHMITZ answered that the work she is doing as the Director of the Alaska Education Recruitment & Retention Center is universal across the entire world and field of education.

[8:55:27 AM](#)

DR. DALE EBCAS, Special Education & Lead Teacher, Kuspuk School District, testified in support of HJR 25. He emphasized the importance of international teachers as a means to address the challenges of in-state teacher recruitment and retention and highlighted the work he has done as both a teacher and community member in Kalskag. He explained that international teachers are "committed" to the communities that they are apart of and urged the committee's support of HJR 25.

[8:59:41 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HJR 25.

[HJR 25 was held over].

HB 190-CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE; TAX CREDITS

[9:00:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 190, "An Act relating to the insurance tax education credit; relating to the income tax education credit; relating to the oil or gas producer education credit; relating to the property tax education credit; relating to the mining business education credit; relating to the fisheries business education credit; relating to the fisheries resource landing tax education credit; renaming the day care assistance program the child care assistance program; relating to the child care assistance program and the child care grant program; and providing for an effective date."

[9:00:46 AM](#)

}AIMEE BUSHNELL, Legislative Liaison, Department of Revenue, On behalf of House Rules by request of the governor, prime sponsor, presented HB 190 to the committee. She read from a prepared statement [not included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Good morning, Madam co-chairs and members of the House Education Committee.

Thank you for hearing House Bill 190 and having us before you today.

My name is Aimee Bushnell, I am the Legislative Liaison for the Department of Revenue.

Good morning, for the record, my name is Leah Van Kirk, Health Care Policy Advisor for the Department of Health.

Starting off, I would like to provide a quick recap of why House Bill 190 is before you today.

Last Legislative Session, Senate Bill 189 passed the Legislature and became law without the Governor's signature on October 9, 2024, as CH15 SLA 24. SB 189 was an omnibus bill that wrapped several other bills into it at the end of session. The sections of SB 189 dealing with the child care portion of the education tax credit came from then House Bill 89. HB 89 had multiple hearings, passed the House and made it through the Senate Health and Social Services committee and eventually to the Senate Finance committee, but ultimately did not make it to the Senate floor.

SB 189 is currently the subject of a lawsuit challenging the "single-subject" of the bill, which would void the changes made last year. Because of that, the Governor has put forward this bill.

To avoid the statutes from being reverted in the event the State loses the challenge to the single-subject rule in court, this bill repeals and replaces with portions of HB 89 that were added to SB 189. This includes the expansion of the education tax credit to include donations made to child care facilities, operated by the employer or a nonprofit, for the children of the taxpayer's employees, or for payments made to an employee of the taxpayer for the purpose of offsetting the employee's child care costs.

There is one additional tax change in this bill, raising the education tax credit cap from \$3M to \$10M. Previously, SB 189 raised the education tax credit cap from \$1M to \$3M.

[9:02:52 AM](#)

LEAH VAN KIRK, Health Care Policy Advisor, Department of Health & Social Services, on behalf of House Rules by request of the governor, prime sponsor, presented HB 190 to the committee. She

read from a prepared statement [not included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The second half of HB 190 focuses on changes to the Child Care Assistance, and Child Care Grant programs to support the affordability and accessibility of child care for families.

This bill makes changes to the child care assistance program by adding additional rate methodology options, such as a cost of care study and the market price survey, to establish subsidy rates that are more aligned with the actual cost of providing child care throughout the state.

This bill also adds language to allow for exemptions from income eligibility requirements in certain instances, following the federal requirements.

- An example of this may include waiving co-pays for families who meet certain criteria, or establishing a subsidy for children of parents who work in the child care sector.

Changes to the Child Care Grant Program include adding requirements for Child Care Grant providers to prioritize children participating in the child care assistance program when filling available child care spaces.

It also establishes the ability for the department to provide grants to high quality child care facilities in the state using quality recognition measures and prohibits grant-funded child care facilities from denying admission based on disability or socioeconomic status.

This bill maintains the technical changes from SB 189 that include updating terminology in statute, removing the reference to "day care" and replacing it with child care, as well as amending the definition of "child care facility."

Although HB 190 does not include some elements from SB 189, it does not prevent the department from addressing them through regulatory changes.

HB 190 does not include 4 elements from SB 189 because the department can make these changes through the regulatory process. Sections removed include:

- The expansion of family income eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program to 105% of the state's median monthly household income, and the establishment of a program to incentivize employers to develop child care programs on site, or near-by.

Funding for these two sections was included in the Governor's proposed budget.

- It also removes the requirement for Child Care providers to be designated as a quality child care facility in order to receive the child care grant. This designation is already built in through the licensing process and child care facilities can reach levels in the already established Learn and Grow system.

- And finally, this bill removes the requirement to cap family contributions or co-pays at 7% because this has become a federal requirement, so a statutory change is not needed.

[9:05:50 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT asked the invited testifiers if they have permission to be in the capitol building and asked what the "missing" pieces of the senate companion bill (SB 189) were in HB 190.

MS. VAN KIRK confirmed that she had permission to attend the current committee meeting and explained that the expansion of the family income eligibility to 105% of the Alaska median income, incentives for the establishment of an onsite employer childcare service, and a 7% cap on insurance copay, which was already addressed by federal law.

[9:09:17 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on HB 190. After ascertaining that there was no one who wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[9:09:42 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that HB 190 would be held over.

[9:10:33 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:10 a.m.