

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE

February 14, 2025

3:17 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Zack Fields, Co-Chair
Representative Carolyn Hall, Co-Chair
Representative Ashley Carrick
Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke
Representative Dan Saddler
Representative Julie Coulombe

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative David Nelson

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 34

"An Act establishing the Alaska Innovation Council; and relating to financial disclosures for members of the Alaska Innovation Council."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 20

"An Act relating to fees for paper documents; and relating to unfair trade practices."

- HEARD & HELD

OVERVIEW: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, CHILD CARE UPDATE

- REMOVED FROM AGENDA

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 34

SHORT TITLE: AK INNOVATION COUNCIL

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) HOLLAND

01/22/25	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	L&C, FIN
01/29/25	(H)	L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124

01/29/25 (H) <Bill Hearing Canceled>
02/10/25 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
02/10/25 (H) Heard & Held
02/10/25 (H) MINUTE(L&C)
02/14/25 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124

BILL: HB 20

SHORT TITLE: PROHIBIT FEES FOR PAPER DOCUMENTS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) SADDLER

01/22/25 (H) PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25 (H) L&C, JUD
02/14/25 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

JON BITTNER, Executive Director
Alaska Small Business Development Center
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony in support of HB 34.

NORRIS KRUEGER, PhD, Executive Director
Leadership Council Member
Ecosystem Builder
Boise, Idaho

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of and answered questions during the hearing on HB 34.

LAURA ODEN, Owner/Founder
Pandere Shoes
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of and answered questions during the hearing on HB 34.

REPRESENTATIVE DAN SADDLER
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HB 20.

NOAH WILKINS, Intern
Representative Dan Saddler
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As intern to Representative Saddler, prime sponsor of HB 20, gave the sectional analysis.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:17:07 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ZACK FIELDS called the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:17 p.m. Representatives Coulombe, Saddler, Burke, Carrick, Hall, and Fields were present at the call to order.

HB 34-AK INNOVATION COUNCIL

[3:17:26 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 34, "An Act establishing the Alaska Innovation Council; and relating to financial disclosures for members of the Alaska Innovation Council."

CO-CHAIR FIELDS announced the committee would hear invited testimony.

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JON BITTNER, Executive Director, Alaska Small Business Development Center (ASBDC), gave invited testimony in support of HB 34. He began by stating that ASBDC has been in operation for over 30 years, with 8 offices around Alaska. He stated ASBDC's goal is to help start and support small businesses in Alaska. He stated that approximately 99 percent of businesses in Alaska qualify as small businesses under the definition used by the Small Business Administration (SBA). He explained that ASBDC provides a variety of services to support small businesses, including individual advising, workshops, training, the Alaska State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI), the Tribal SSBCI consortium, and various buy-local programs.

MR. BITTNER stressed the importance of small businesses, noting that small businesses in Alaska drive new job creation and the existing workforce. He asserted that small businesses help diversify the economy, making it more stable and robust. He stated that ASBDC approves of any efforts to focus attention on how to support small businesses in communities across the state. He stated that ASBDC supported HB 34.

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CO-CHAIR FIELDS opened public testimony on HB 34.

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NORRIS KRUEGER, PhD, Executive Director, Leadership Council Member, Ecosystem Building Leadership Network (EBLN), testified in support of HB 34. He stated that the biggest complaint he hears from innovators is that governments are not listening to them. He asserted that, if executed well, HB 34 would be an inexpensive way to both guide policy and give voice to innovators in Alaska. He shared that he was involved in efforts in Idaho to create a similar innovation plan approximately 20 years ago, called the Idaho State Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategy. He shared an anecdote about Canada's efforts to focus on innovation policy. He concluded by reiterating that [HB 34] is "a huge opportunity for a very small amount of money to make a real difference for the people ... in the trenches ... whether a start-up founder [or] a small business owner."

DR. KRUEGER, in response to a question from Representative Saddler regarding credentials, stated that he has a research PhD in entrepreneurship, and he is on the leadership network of the EBLN. Additionally, Dr. Krueger said he mentors start-ups and advocates for innovation-friendly policies at the state and national level.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked what benefits small businesses in Alaska would receive with the passage of HB 34.

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DR. KRUEGER responded that a dozen major surveys of small business owners concluded that small business owners would like to be heard, as opposed to being told what to do by government entities. He offered an anecdote to Google Mapping, arguing that too often in economic planning, every "route" is carefully planned without a destination, whereas, in Google Mapping, the beginning and end of a journey are clearly defined.

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LAURA ODEN, Owner/Founder, Pandere Shoes, testified in support of HB 34. She explained that Pandere Shoes makes expandable footwear for individuals with medical conditions. She stated that she has owned multiple businesses and been involved in the

startup community in Alaska for 10 years. She stated that she had mentored and counseled many start-ups in Alaska.

MS. ODEN emphasized the inconsistency in support for small businesses/start-ups in Alaska. She offered appreciation that the Alaska Innovation Council would have stakeholders with dedicated annual meetings. She opined that Alaska businesses could use intentional planning and support on the state level. She is in support of HB 34.

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REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE asked which types of supports small businesses in Alaska need the most.

MS. ODEN responded that she understood that [identifying needed types of support] to be a function of the proposed Alaska Innovation Council. She provided some personal examples of support: having the right person to talk to; having the right person to network with; and financial support. She offered her belief that one of the biggest needs for small businesses/start-ups is access to loans. She stated, for example, that a person could get a \$150,000 loan for a start-up but not a \$15,000 loan.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether support requested would be "advice" or "money." Further, he questioned what the council could offer that current public and/or private institutions cannot.

MS. ODEN replied that entrepreneurs are always in need of advice, money, and people. She said she is unsure what type of support the council would offer via the state. She stated that she could offer what her business needs but could not speak to every small business in Alaska.

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CO-CHAIR FIELDS, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 34.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS announced that HB 34 was held over.

HB 20-PROHIBIT FEES FOR PAPER DOCUMENTS

[3:37:26 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 20, "An Act relating to fees for paper documents; and relating to unfair trade practices."

[3:37:51 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DAN SADDLER, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 20. He began that, historically, utility, gas, or insurance bills were typically bills paid via mail with a paper check. He continued that, with the advent of the Internet, many transactions have been made online. He described some advantages of online payment: automation, efficiency, decreased costs, and increased profit margins.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER continued that many businesses are essentially requiring transactions to be done online or pay a fee, which can be variable. He provided an example, noting that it is common to pay a few hundred dollars annually in fees. He asserted that older individuals, who are less likely to conduct online transactions and more likely to be on fixed incomes, are disproportionately affected by paper fees. Further, he noted that Internet connectivity in Alaska is unreliable, and those with inconsistent Internet access could face higher fees.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER stated that HB 20 would prohibit businesses from charging customers different rates based on paperless versus paper transaction statements. He stated that it poses no cost to the state and no additional cost to businesses. He concluded by asserting that HB 20 would generate significant benefits to consumers/constituents.

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NOAH WILKINS, Intern, Representative Dan Saddler, Alaska State Legislature, as intern to Representative Saddler, prime sponsor of HB 20, gave the sectional analysis [included in the committee file], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 1: Page 1, lines 3-11

Section 1 amends AS 21.36 by adding a new section, AS 21.36.525, which prohibits insurers from charging an additional fee or different rate for individuals who prefer to receive paper copies of invoices, statements and other documents.

This section does not, however, prevent an insurer from charging a fee for providing duplicate copies of any documents previously provided.

Section 2: Page 1, lines 12-15, & page 2, lines 1-4

Section 2 amends AS 45.45 by adding a new section, AS 45.45.940, which prohibits businesses from charging an additional fee or a different rate for individuals who prefer to receive paper copies of invoices, statements and other documents.

This section does not, however, prevent a business from charging a fee for providing duplicate copies of any documents previously provided.

Section 2 defines "business" by the meaning given in AS 43.70.110, which states a business is "a for profit or nonprofit entity engaging or offering to engage in a trade, a service, a profession, or an activity with the goal of receiving a financial benefit in exchange for the provision of services, or goods or other property."

Section 3: Page 2, lines 5-6

Section 3 adds to the list of unlawful business acts and practices in Title 45 to include violations of AS 45.45.940, established in Section 2 of this bill.

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REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK asked whether there are any state departments that charge for receiving paper documents. Further, she asked whether state departments, should they charge for receiving paper documents, would be covered under the proposed legislation.

[3:43:10 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER responded that HB 20 is narrowly focused on businesses, and the State of Alaska does not fall under that definition.

[HB 20 was held over.]

[3:43:57 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS set amendment deadlines for SB 15, HB 49, and HB 74 for 10:00 a.m. on Monday, February 17.

3:44:38 PM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:44 p.m.