

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

January 28, 2026

3:19 p.m.

DRAFT

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: THE ROLE OF SENIORS & YOUTH IN ALASKA'S WORKFORCE

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

DAN ROBINSON, Chief
Division of Research and Analysis
Department of Labor & Workforce Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave presentation titled: The Role of Seniors & Youth in Alaska's Workforce

MARGE STONEKING, Associate State Director for Advocacy
AARP Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony that highlighted the importance of senior involvement in the workforce.

SEAN SCHUBERT, Career & College Resources Coordinator

King Tech High School
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Discussed youth employment preparation programs at King Tech High School.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:19:02 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR HALL called the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:19 p.m. Representatives Fields, Hall, Carrick, Frier, Saddler, Nelson, and Coulombe were present at the call to order.

Presentation: The Role of Seniors & Youth in Alaska's Workforce

[Includes discussion of HB 96.]

[3:19:42 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR HALL announced that the only order of business would be a presentation regarding the role of seniors & youth in Alaska's workforce.

[3:20:04 PM](#)

DAN ROBINSON, Chief, Division of Research and Analysis, Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DLWD), on behalf of DLWD, gave a presentation regarding the role of youth and seniors in Alaska's workforce via PowerPoint [hard copy included in committee file]. He said that the presentation would highlight information that was included in DLWD's October 2025 publication of Alaska Economic Trends. He drew the committee's attention to a quick response (QR) code included on slide 2 that would allow for easy access to the presentation from a mobile device.

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MR. ROBINSON, proceeded to slide 3 of the presentation, which provided a bar graph summary of youth workers in Alaska. He said that the bars represent the total number of resident workers in Alaska over a timeframe. Furthermore, he said that the blue line is the percentage of youth workers 14 to 17 years old. He said that an interesting decline could be observed, starting in the early 2000s through the Great Recession, and since then employment rates have remained fairly low. He said this trend could be observed at a national level as well. However, there was an increase in youth employment since the COVID-19 Pandemic.

MR. ROBINSON proceeded to slide 4, which illustrates teen wages during/after the COVID-19 Pandemic. He noted that the graph illustrated quarterly wages and followed COVID-19 in 2020, when it increased to \$2,188. He noted that these were fairly low wages but were expected to be given to the 14-to-17-year-old demographic, who typically work in low-wage jobs. He said that wage increases can likely be attributed to employers' need to fill positions. He explained that many of these workers are in hotels, restaurants, and retail. He said that there was some involvement in local government, and a little bit of construction involvement as well. He said that construction work was an outlier profession that had higher earnings. He explained that wages go up when the demand for labor exceeds supply, simple economics. He said if employers were hungry to fill positions, they often reach into the youth labor pool.

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MR. ROBINSON, proceeded to slide 5 of the presentation, which illustrates senior workers in the workforce. He noted that as

the graph indicates, senior involvement in the workforce has steadily increased since 2003. From 1.8 percent of the total workforce in 2003 to 6.2 percent in 2023.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether there is a point at which the percentage of older workers begin to "peel down," specific to age.

MR. ROBINSON responded that the largest number of senior workers mentioned are 68 years old and older seniors are less likely to participate in the workforce, this was especially apparent for seniors in their 70s.

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MR. ROBINSON proceeded to slide 6 of the presentation, which had a line graph that illustrated senior growth in the workforce since 2003. Additionally, it provided a line that illustrated youth worker growth as well. Senior worker involvement in the workforce has grown 350 percent since 2003; higher growth relative to other age groups.

MR. ROBINSON proceeded to slide 7, which illustrated the regions in Alaska and their respective proportions of workers aged 65 or older. He said that there are more people aged 65 or older; the "baby boomers." He specified that this group of people were born from 1946 to 1964 and the youngest of them will turn 62 in 2026. He said that baby boomers had a disproportionate number of children, the "echo boomers," who represent the largest age group in Alaska. He said that Southeast Alaska sees many

workers aged over 65, whereas the North Slope has proportionally fewer workers 65 or older, and fewer people aged 65 or older living there.

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REPRESENTATIVE FRIER asked whether the numbers pertaining to the North Slope included workers.

MR. ROBINSON confirmed that the summaries included North Slope workers. He clarified that the summaries included all workers in a region and not just those who lived there.

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REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE asked whether there was any information pertaining to what kinds of jobs senior workers are occupying. She understood that childcare and daycare were large employment sectors for baby boomers.

MR. ROBINSON responded that healthcare workers were the second largest profession held by baby boomers. He was unsure of the first but thought it may be schoolteachers, with a large number of senior workers working in local government and retail professions as well.

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CO-CHAIR HALL asked whether the workforce statistics could be attributed to Alaska's cost of living or whether it was more like the "silver tsunami" effect.

MR. ROBINSON responded that the stock market and housing equity have been quite friendly to people 65 or older. He said that this group is likely able to retire more easily now than previously during the COVID-19 Pandemic. He said that retirement can be "sticky" and if someone can afford to stay retired, they usually do. He noted that some people living on a fixed income might return to work during periods of high inflation. He said it was a little too early to fully illustrate this type of data.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said that he was both "surprised" and "pleased" to see so few slides. He asked whether he understood what share of the entire state's wages are held by both teens and older Alaskans and how important they were to the overall economy.

MR. ROBINSON responded that both groups combined only account for around 10 percent of the total resident workforce.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER clarified that he was asking for numbers pertaining to wages.

MR. ROBINSON responded that he was to talk about this next. He said that when looking at the youth workers, they make approximately \$8,000 dollars a year.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether there was an "all in" percentage for both cohorts of young and senior workers.

MR. ROBINSON responded that this could be calculated and information could be shared in a follow-up.

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MR. ROBINSON proceeded to slide 8, which illustrated labor statistics of Alaska's working age population 18-64 years old. The graph indicates a decrease in workforce involvement from 2015-2025 for this age group. He said during this time there was an approximate decrease of 32,000-33,000 people of working age. He said that the data is "fuzzy" and the decrease can be attributed to fewer working age people in Alaska, not necessarily employment issues. He noted however, that the percentage of non-resident workers in the economy is going up; in fact, it is nearly a 30-year high. He said that a report would soon be released that details 2024, and it indicates that 22.9 percent of all Alaska workers were nonresidents.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether there was any information that could be used to compare Alaska to the national average regarding the proportion of older and younger workers.

MR. ROBINSON explained that Alaska was fortunate that both age and gender could be determined with the workforce. He said that this could be done by analysis of the state's permanent fund dividend (PFD) information. He said that other states did not have this source of information. The closest tools other states would have available is Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) records or voter records, both of which are far less comprehensive than a PFD application file. However, he did say

that there would be some information available from the U.S. Census Bureau. He explained that while Alaska has seen a jump in seniors in the workforce, the state was still quite young compared to other states. He said that older people tend to want to retire in warmer destinations. Furthermore, birth rates help shape these statistics. He said that Alaska and Utah tend to be the youngest states; Utah due to higher birth rates and Alaska because retired people leave Alaska at higher rates than other states.

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REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK remarked that the presentation included information on the annualized earnings for the youth and senior populations. She asked whether Mr. Robinson knew what the annual earnings for the working-age population might be.

MR. ROBINSON responded that the earnings average for working-age members was around \$60,000. He said that this included residents and assumes quarterly work; he noted that some workers do not work over four quarters.

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK asked whether vacancy rates in Alaska have changed since COVID-19 and whether public sector jobs were beginning to be filled by both seniors and youth since the pandemic.

MR. ROBINSON responded that there is a dataset called Jobs Opening and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) and it shows really high numbers of vacancies in Alaska and across the country after COVID-19. He said that since the pandemic, vacancy numbers have gone down, and the market has somewhat cooled.

MR. ROBINSON noted that recent applications for state positions, including those in his department, have gone way up. He said that some exploration of this would yield some interesting data.

[3:39:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked about general labor economics and whether having a large number of youth and seniors in the workforce was a sign of good or poor health of an economy.

MR. ROBINSON responded that anytime someone is talking about labor force participation, it is important to separate "why" some people are working to the best degree possible. He said that when a 70-year-old doctor is working, it is usually safe to assume that they are working because "they want to." He said that someone that age working in a grocery store may be working under a different pretense.

MR. ROBINSON said that the department doesn't think in terms of good, bad, or healthy, but much like a meteorologist, it is called for what it is.

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REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE asked whether Mr. Robinson understood what the current unemployment rate or unemployment benefits rate was for the working age population.

MR. ROBINSON responded that there was some detailed information regarding who files for unemployment insurance, including by age group.

REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE said that she was interested in unemployment benefits issued to members of the working age population.

MR. ROBINSON responded that he could follow up and send unemployment claims by age bracket.

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MARGE STONEKING, Associate State Director for Advocacy, AARP Alaska, began by explaining that workers aged 65 and older have become the fastest growing labor force in recent decades across the country. She said that according to a 2023 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics study, nearly half of individuals born between 1946 and 1960 expect to work past age 70 or do not plan to retire at all. She remarked that in recent years, the resilience of older workers has been especially notable, with many actively seeking new jobs or career changes. According to an AARP survey, approximately 24 percent of workers aged 50 and above planned to change jobs in 2025. She said that this has been driven by both financial needs from rising costs and the desire for meaningful or flexible work arrangements. She noted that some people choose to keep working to remain engaged, challenged, and fulfilled, while others simply are not financially prepared to retire. Given advancements in medicine and living standards, someone at age 60 can expect to live another 20 years, meaning their retirement savings must last for decades. She said that given the rising costs, it has become clear that retirement age before age 65 is far more a challenge than before.

MS. STONEKING explained that looking at DLWD's Alaska Economic Trends publication, one can see a notable difference between occupation and average pay for Alaskans 65 and older and by their gender. She noted that women earn less on average given the same experience and job, which translates to greater retirement challenges. Additionally, women live longer than men and make up the majority of unpaid family caregivers and are more likely to be single in their senior years. She said that this places older Alaska women in a challenged position, often working low-paid jobs such as retail and caregiving.

MS. STONEKING stated that a diverse workforce offers tangible benefits to a workplace by broadened perspectives and increased innovation and creativity. She said that this is especially important given the rise of senior involvement in the workplace. In a 2023 AARP Global Employee survey, AARP found increased levels of job satisfaction for both older and younger workers who work in multigenerational environments. However, negative stereotypes and outdated assumptions mean that older workers and job seekers are often treated unfairly. But, contrary to common misconceptions, older workers offer many benefits to an employer such as expertise, maturity, perspective, reliability, work accuracy, and social skills, and they remain in their job longer.

MS. STONEKING said that the main barrier to employment for older workers is age discrimination during the hiring process and in the workplace. According to AARP research, 90 percent of workers aged 50 and older believe that age discrimination against older workers is common in the workplace today. Additionally, 64 percent of older workers have seen or experienced age discrimination. She said these numbers are even

higher for Black workers and women older than 50. Consequently, older workers continue to face significant challenges such as long-term unemployment and as mentioned, age discrimination. She reiterated that older workers should be valued members of the workforce and noted the value they bring to an employer. Addressing age-related barriers to employment, such as age discrimination, is crucial to ensure that older Americans can remain in the workforce or return to it if necessary. She said that age discrimination also prevents labor shortages from being addressed while qualified workers are sidelined. She noted that she was looking forward to the data that was requested from Mr. Robinson about unemployment rates by age group.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER mentioned that wage disparities between genders often include other factors than just gender. He asked what states or sectors in Alaska take advantage of older workers and what industry is getting the most benefit from employing them.

MS. STONEKING said that she did not have this data available but recognized it as a good question.

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CO-CHAIR FIELDS said that he was curious about whether Ms. Stoneking had anecdotal evidence that would give insights into whether older workers are working by choice or by necessity.

MS. STONEKING responded that she did not have any specific data pertaining to this but anecdotally, she has heard from both

those who go back to work or continue working that it is often a necessity.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS noted that one area of employment that Ms. Stoneking described in her invited testimony was family care. He said that the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee had previously moved HB 96 through the committee which was designed to help ensure that caregiving is a job that someone can support themselves. He opined that it is a great bill and it was currently under deliberation in the House Finance Standing Committee. He said that he would not have originally thought about caregiving as a primary workplace occupation for seniors and welcomed any insights from AARP on how it could be financially sustainable. He said that it is likely an important career given current demographic change.

MS. STONEKING said that she could follow up with the question.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said that the committee had heard references regarding the Alaska Economic Trends magazine from Mr. Robinson. He asked whether Ms. Stoneking thought that there was anything special from this publication that may warrant attention.

MS. STONEKING said that she did not focus on youth data but there was nothing pertaining to seniors that surprised her.

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SEAN SCHUBERT, Career & College Resources Coordinator, King Tech High School, remarked that he has had the opportunity to help young Alaskans seek employment, continued education, and training for more than 30 years. This has included work with the Job Corps, Alaska Department of Labor Youth Services, and currently the Anchorage School District at King Tech High School. He said that King Tech is a career technical education school that prides itself on preparing young adults to enter the workforce competently and confidently. This includes industry validated classroom instruction, job shadows, internships, and real work experience.

MR. SCHUBERT described the excitement when a student lands a job or internship. He noted that recently six young men and women told him that they recently were hired by Carlile as paid interns, a starting point to a career as a diesel technician.

MR. SCHUBERT noted that he started his work life at a young age with part-time work. This included work at a bakery, fast-food venue, construction, and then a medical record office. Each allowed the opportunity to learn different skill sets and how to apply them in different ways. He said that these experiences helped him understand workplace expectations and grow a sense of work ethic. He remarked that the same is true for adolescents and young adults in the workplace today. He said this type of workplace growing experience is extremely important for Alaska, particularly to address negative net migration from the state. He noted that young adults leaving the state shrinks both the economy and workforce each year.

MR. SCHUBERT said that like senior workers, young people face challenges in the workforce. Many businesses require employees

to be 18 years or older, typically due to insurance requirements. He said that if businesses could get help hiring people under 18 by offsetting insurance hikes, companies could develop Alaska's emerging workforce while meeting entry-level needs.

MR. SCHUBERT said that there has been success helping businesses explore unpaid internships for adolescent workers. He said that student liability needs are met by the Anchorage School District, which allows students to gain experience and apply skills learned in career technical education classrooms.

MR. SCHUBERT noted that the transportation industry can be challenging. Workplace involvement often requires a driver's license and access to a vehicle, furthermore there are challenges with inability to pay for driving school. He said that funding from the state to school districts could help cover costs associated with instructors, designated vehicles, and insurance for school sponsored driving education would help adolescent engagement in the transportation industry.

MR. SCHUBERT noted that education plays a significant role in overcoming these barriers and properly funded initiatives that help young adults go to work would help businesses maintain staffing levels and help address out-migration of Alaskans. He concluded by reiterating that anchoring young Alaskans to Alaska is critical.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked what a good first job might be to set a young person up for a positive career trajectory in Alaska.

MR. SCHUBERT responded that it is not just about finding "the right job" but what would be a "good job" based on a student's trajectory of interest. He noted that he recently had a young man named Jaden come to him with a passion in automotive related work. He was only 16, which limited shop work, but engagement with places such as NAPA, AutoZone, and O'Riley's could allow for industry placement without age requirements.

MR. SCHUBERT said that often students want the "biggest bang for their time" or the higher earning positions. However, he often needs to warn students that experience and career trajectory are important considerations as well.

MR. SCHUBERT noted that he has students interested in construction, retail, healthcare, tourism, and restaurants and there are multiple partnerships with businesses in Anchorage to help with employment accommodation. He said many businesses are clamoring for more people and it is important to be creative when trying to meet these staffing needs.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said that the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee has previously debated and approved legislation to support youth employment opportunities in the bar and club workspace. He understood that King Tech High School had a good hospitality and cooking program but asked whether the school had considered expanding into training programs to support new employment accommodations in bars or other licensed establishments.

MR. SCHUBERT responded that youth employment involvement with these types of businesses is done through partnerships. He remarked that King Tech High School has a current partnership with the Anchorage Hospitality Foundation that has helped to give students employment opportunities with businesses like 49th State Brewing, Hotel Captain Cook, and the Spenard Roadhouse. He said that in the classroom, students are taught to understand the work boundaries that include where and when they cannot participate as an employee. Furthermore, businesses help reinforce these working policies. He said that they can learn these types of procedures prior to moving into additional career opportunities after they turn 21.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked for clarification of the Anchorage Hospitality Foundation and whether it was related to other organizations.

MR. SCHUBERT responded that the Anchorage Hospitality Foundation is a nonprofit organization that helps coordinate activities for businesses. He said that currently five of his students were doing paid internships that allowed school credit for work.

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REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE commented that she has hired teenagers in the past for work in retail. She said that labor laws can create a hiring challenge for employers. This includes limitations of workable time, shift length and breaks, operating specific equipment, and not being able to work past 9:45 p.m. She did not disagree with youth labor laws but noted that it can be a challenge for businesses to "open the door to a minor."

She said it seems as if youth are being funneled into hospitality and retail sectors because these industries can adapt to current youth labor laws. She asked whether Mr. Schubert had any insight into whether he felt current laws were restricting opportunities for youth workers.

MR. SCHUBERT said that this often requires being creative. He said that last summer, he had multiple young men and women work in the construction industry, none of whom were over 18 years of age. He said that it was very restrictive regarding what job roles they could do, in fact multiple businesses cannot even hire someone under 18 due to insurance stipulations. He said that in this instance they were hired as unpaid interns. As unpaid interns they were able to go to work and get amazing work experience. As interns, the students could work only 60 hours a week, this was a decision by the employer, the Alaska Homebuilders Association. The business understood that the students could not be paid, could not be placed on the books, but were able to be awarded scholarships at the end of their work. He said that at the end of the summer, the Alaska Homebuilder Association awarded each student a scholarship that had equated to 16 dollars-an-hour at 60 hours a week. He said that in some instances for unpaid interns, the school district covers liability insurance for the students.

MR. SCHUBERT noted that this same approach does not work in every industry. He said that a couple of other students are working for Tundra Telecommunications but are 18 years old, which gives them more working flexibility. He said that one student started there at 17 years old and the company worked with their insurance provider to determine what exactly the student could do and could not do. He said that the company

assigned a staff member to monitor the 17-year-old and ensured that they were not doing work that had age restrictions. As a result of this flexibility, that student is working for them again as a paid intern and launching his career. He concluded by reiterating that sometimes workplaces can be restrictive but with a creative approach, solutions can be developed.

[4:03:42 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR HALL asked Mr. Schubert whether there was any financial literacy education provided for students.

MR. SCHUBERT responded that many students go through financial math and the instructor does a great job helping them understand taxes, retirement, investments, how to stretch a dollar, and even costs of buying bulk as opposed to individual units. He said that King Tech does that best and can ensure that students understand how to value earned income. He said that this education also covers savings plans for any goals that follow high school: this could include college, trade school, apprenticeships, or even something else. Each of these would require some financial investment. He said that this plan includes ensuring adequate savings are put aside from paychecks to support future decision-making.

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CO-CHAIR HALL, after ascertaining that there were no additional questions from committee members, announced that this would conclude the presentation.

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4:06:34 PM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 4:06 p.m.