

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 18, 2025

3:18 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Ashley Carrick, Chair  
Representative Andi Story, Vice Chair  
Representative Rebecca Himschoot  
Representative Ky Holland  
Representative Sarah Vance  
Representative Kevin McCabe  
Representative Elexie Moore

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 75

"An Act relating to national criminal history record checks for certain employees of the Department of Revenue; relating to allowable absences for eligibility for a permanent fund dividend; relating to the confidentiality of certain information provided on a permanent fund dividend application; relating to electronic notice of debt collection executed on a permanent fund dividend; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 25

"An Act relating to disposable food service ware; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 91

"An Act relating to the lawful operation of retail marijuana stores; relating to marijuana cultivation; relating to the registration of marijuana establishments; relating to marijuana taxes; relating to the duties of the Department of Revenue; and providing for an effective date."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 75

SHORT TITLE: PERM FUND; EMPLOYMENT; ELIGIBILITY

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) BYNUM

01/31/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/31/25 (H) STA, L&C  
02/18/25 (H) STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 25

SHORT TITLE: DISPOSABLE FOOD SERVICE WARE

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) JOSEPHSON

01/22/25 (H) PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25  
01/22/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/22/25 (H) STA, L&C  
02/18/25 (H) STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE JEREMY BYNUM

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, introduced HB 75.

TREVOR SHAW, Staff

Representative Jeremy Bynum

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Bynum, prime sponsor, offered the sectional for HB 75 and responded to questions.

REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, introduced HB 25.

KEN ALPER, Staff

Representative Andy Josephson

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Josephson, prime sponsor, answered questions about HB 25.

## **ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CHAIR ASHLEY CARRICK** called the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:18 p.m. Representatives Story, Moore, McCabe, Holland, Himschoot, and Carrick were present at the call to order. Representative Vance arrived as the meeting was in progress.

### **HB 75-PERM FUND; EMPLOYMENT; ELIGIBILITY**

[Contains discussion of SB 77.]

[3:19:53 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 75, "An Act relating to national criminal history record checks for certain employees of the Department of Revenue; relating to allowable absences for eligibility for a permanent fund dividend; relating to the confidentiality of certain information provided on a permanent fund dividend application; relating to electronic notice of debt collection executed on a permanent fund dividend; and providing for an effective date."

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REPRESENTATIVE JEREMY BYNUM, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, introduced HB 75. He said this bill would do a few things, mostly it would provide mechanisms to clean up a few housekeeping items and it would make provisions to protect Merchant Marines. He said the permanent fund dividend (PFD) is a cornerstone of economic stability for many residents and outdated regulations have created burdens on Alaskans pursuing academia, healthcare, or other interests. He said HB 75 would work to both modernize allowable absences and improve administrative efficiency and security. He remarked that the proposed bill would treat the Merchant Marine Academy the same as attending college. It would allow Alaskans to attend this technical training without losing PFD eligibility. He also said it would provide relief for college students who cannot return home during breaks. It also would modernize the rules pertaining to absences regarding healthcare. He said HB 75 would also require fingerprint background checks for PFD employees who handle sensitive data, and it would ensure that

PFD applicant details are confidential. Both actions would help address PFD security measures for applicants using sensitive data. It also would allow residents to opt-in for the electronic levy notice which would slash costs with printing and mailing. He said the opt-in is optional and the previous standards would still stand in place. By making these changes it would help strengthen the PFD and modernize it for the benefit of the residents.

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TREVOR SHAW, Staff, Representative Jeremy Bynum, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Bynum, prime sponsor, discussed HB 75. He said this is a nearly identical companion bill to Senator Jesse Kiehl's SB 77. He said that many of the material provisions on HB 75 were included in Senate Bill 85, offered at the request of the governor during the Thirty-Third Alaska State Legislature, but it was not pass.

MR. SHAW offered the sectional analysis for HB 75: [provided in committee file], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

**Section 1.** Requires the Permanent Fund Division to conduct background checks on and fingerprint its employees and applicants for employment within the Division.

**Section 2.** Modifies the allowable absences for Permanent Fund Dividend eligibility to include:

- Absences for school breaks and holiday, not including summer break, during the academic year.

- Education (1) to become a merchant mariner, and (2) through other vocational programs approved by the United States Coast Guard.

- Prevents medical absences from limiting the length of voluntary absences.

**Section 3.** Aligns to Sect 1., requiring the Permanent Fund Division to conduct background checks on and fingerprint its employees and applicants for employment within the Division.

**Section 4.** Makes the names of Permanent Fund Dividend applicants confidential.

**Section 5.** Allows an opt-in option for Permanent Fund Dividend recipients to receive levy notices electronically.

**Section 6.** Establishes an effective date of January 1, 2026.

MR. SHAW, after discussing the sectional analysis for HB 75, remarked that various institutions have submitted letters of approval for both HB 75 and SB 77. These include the Alaska Chamber, Tote Maritime Alaska, and Matson Shipping. He explained the slight differences between both SB 77 and HB 75 and closed by remarking the HB 75 has a zero fiscal note.

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REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked what the impetus was for adding the "boat tech program" that trains students for the Merchant Marines. He asked if it was a constituent request and what prompted it.

REPRESENTATIVE BYNUM responded that Alaska as a whole and specifically Southeast is a heavy maritime economy. The proposed bill tries to ensure that mariners receive the same benefits as others that receive education outside of the state.

MR. SHAW added that the thought process behind this was that every other program that is credentialed by the US Military is covered under the existing allowable absences for the PFD. The intent is to expand that to other programs covered by the United States Coast Guard as well.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that he was interested in an amendment for the same reasons. He said there are thousands of freight pilots in Alaska that have frequent absences from the state. He asked if this would be an appropriate amendment to add to the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE BYNUM replied that it could be considered but inquired whether the consideration was for educational purposes or general employment.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE responded that there are several airline pilots that own homes and live in the state. He remarked that many of the airline employers have pilots gone for extended periods of time. He said training could take months long and in different states. He remarked that for several years he did not receive the dividend for this exact same reason.

REPRESENTATIVE BYNUM responded that he would need to see the specific language and it could be considered.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY remarked that there are two other branches of service that had not been included, and she has tried to get allowable absences for. These include the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Commissioned Officer Corps and the Commission of the United States Public Health Service. She said both these branches have had reasons for extended absences. She said that she would give information regarding an amendment to add to the bill. She also said she has spoken to the prime sponsor of the companion bill [SB 77] regarding this topic.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY said she was curious to what the reasoning for background checks was and whether there was a report of an instance that warrants these checks.

MR. SHAW responded that the impetus behind this specific provision is that PFD employees have access to a lot of sensitive information and are among the few if not only state employees that have access to social security numbers, addresses and bank account information. The provision that would require background checks and fingerprinting would be the same requirements for other professions. He said some of the other professions that require these same background checks often don't even have access to the same degree of sensitive information. He said this was part of the governor's request from Senate Bill 85 during the last legislative session. He said the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) cannot do this for state employees unless it receives statutory authorization to do so.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked if there had been any documented cases in which sensitive information handling had gone awry.

MR. SHAW responded that this hadn't happened yet, and this provision would be a preventive measure.

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REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked what the current vacancy rate was with the Permanent Fund Division.

MR. SHAW responded that he would be guessing if he threw out a number but could follow-up with that information.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked if breaks or holidays were specifically defined in the proposed bill.

MR. SHAW responded that it is not specifically defined and that's why the additional language exists that talks about the academic calendar year. He said that specific provision could have variance depending on the educational institution's individual calendar.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked about a mental health break or a work break and where that would land with this language.

MR. SHAW said that the break would be defined by the institution. This includes spring break; however, summer breaks wouldn't be included in this provision.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT remarked that she had some allowances that were requested by her district. She said that she also had an amendment that might be offered if others were added.

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CHAIR CARRICK remarked that she understood that the Department of Revenue had asked about this provision in the past. She said that confidentiality for the applicants wasn't something that she had heard about and asked Representative Bynum if he could describe the impetus for this.

REPRESENTATIVE BYNUM responded that it is an important aspect of when discussing the information that is available and making sure the citizens have confidential information. He said that voter records were publicly available, but it was not tied to monetary or financial information.

MR. SHAW added that it comes from a couple angles. First is that it follows the same impetus as the changes for fingerprinting and background checks. He said that with voter information so readily available in communities with an aging population that it is a theft prevention measure. He said that unless there are specific reasons for personalized information, the information would remain confidential. He said that the theft component was one side of it and tightening things up would address this. He said there have been times when division employees have released the names of PFD applicants. He said in work with the companion bill SB 77, this was a point of discussion.

CHAIR CARRICK said that she didn't know that this information was accessible to the public and she was interested in learning more.

REPRESENTATIVE BYNUM added that this would not prevent the release of any court ordered information or requested information for financial institutions. Its purpose is just to protect the PFD recipients.

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REPRESENTATIVE MOORE asked if work was conducted with the Permanent Fund Division to develop the policies on HB 75.

REPRESENTATIVE BYNUM responded that a lot of the bill mechanics were from the previous governor's bill Senate Bill 85. He said those requests on the previous bill were coordinated with the Permanent Fund Division. He said the component specifically about the Merchant Marine Academy was to talk about schooling opportunities and to align them with other uniform services. He said that he would need to go back and see whether this was a specific recommendation or not.

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REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND asked how many Merchant Marines are based in Alaska. He remarked that his grandfather was one and he had constituents that were Merchant Marines. He remarked that these were important jobs in the state.

REPRESENTATIVE BYNUM responded that he would get information to follow-up with this inquiry. He also said that the Merchant Marine Academy is open for other folks to go and learn various trades without a service obligation to the Merchant Marines. He said it could be broader for the maritime industry in Alaska.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY commented that it was one of Don Youngs desires that this exemption be put in place.

MR. SHAW, in follow-up regarding Representative Moore's previous question, said that the specific language regarding the merchant marines was in the governor's original bill; the provisions related to fingerprinting and background checks were also included. He said there are a lot of opportunities for cross-referencing personal information, and this was a point of discussion.

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CHAIR CARRICK after ascertaining that there were no additional questions from committee members, announced that HB 75 was held over.

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The committee took an at-ease from 3:47 p.m. to 3:48 p.m.

**HB 25-DISPOSABLE FOOD SERVICE WARE**

[3:48:15 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 25 "An Act relating to disposable food service ware; and providing for an effective date."

[3:48:44 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON, Legislator, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, introduced HB 25 with a PowerPoint presentation. [hard copy included in committee file.] He said HB 25 would ban or restrict restaurant use of polystyrene, commonly called Styrofoam. He said that polystyrene came to his attention as a source of concern when he attended the 2019 National Caucus of Environmental Legislators. He said that there are bipartisan legislators that attend this event. He learned here that Maryland was the first state to restrict the use of polystyrene, and since that time about 12 states have joined Maryland by adding restrictions and there are at least 250 cities that restrict this product. He said he brought this bill forward given previous microbead legislation and other discussions. He said that the Matanuska-Susitna ("Mat-Su") Valley had moved forward to ban plastic bags and several cities have followed suit as well.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON said polystyrene is an insidious product and creates a climate footprint that alternative products would not. He said that polystyrene is a significant environmental pollutant, it does not degrade, it breaks into pieces, and it travels easily. He remarked that it is particularly problematic in water bodies. He said that it is a plastic, and it degrades into microplastics and creates a severe risk to wildlife and human health. He said that it is composed of the chemical styrene, and it has been linked to multiple health ailments including cancer. He said that this chemical can harm the respiratory tract, cause eye irritation,

gastrointestinal ailments, and vision and hearing problems as well. He said the by-product from leeching, and it's broken down microparticulate can cause serious problems for wildlife. He said that this product is not recyclable but often included in recycling efforts and causes recycling issues for products exposed to it. He said that chemical recycling is not an effective solution for polystyrene, and it creates other health hazards and waste. He spoke about the availability of alternative materials that can act as substitutes for this product.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON said that more than 50 chemical byproducts are released during the manufacturing process, and this also causes serious implications. He remarked that polystyrene is a problem on the production end and the pollution end. He said that plant-based material substitutes do not create the same environmental hazards. He remarked that one study found that while polystyrene was 1 percent of waste, it constituted 10-40 percent of all litter found on streams. It takes up to 500 years to biodegrade. Representative Josephson said that he felt there was a duty as an Alaskan to participate in solving this plastic crisis. He said that in conjunction with the Alaska Committee Action on Toxics, this is the pathway that should be considered.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON said that the proposed bill does have some carveouts. It would not restrict products coming to Alaska that are already wrapped in polystyrene. He said that the proposed bill would not interrupt interstate commerce. He said it would also allow the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to entertain exemptions if alternatives are not available at a fiscally feasible standpoint. He said that multiple documents were available that discuss the need for this legislation. He said that one such document claims that food ware products are the most common way Americans interact with Styrofoam. He said packaging can also cause leeching concerns. He said that daily collected plastic waste could fill the entirety of the Dallas Cowboys Stadium. He said that Styrofoam products alone could fill four Dallas Cowboys stadiums in a single year.

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CHAIR CARRICK mentioned that some companies are trying to reduce Styrofoam waste. She asked why enact legislation to force companies to do this as opposed to letting the free market eliminate it.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON responded that he had been visited by the American Chemistry Council, and they opposed the legislation. He said that people will not automatically prescribe to a trend. He said that 69 countries have banned the product and 250 cities have. He said it is a hazard to the fisheries and Alaska is uniquely vulnerable in that respect. He also noted that there are alternatives available, and he thinks that an incentive is needed, and in this case, it is a restriction with a start in restaurants. He said this bill would not disable the industry and currently alternatives were used by some cities including Juneau.

CHAIR CARRICK remarked that Alaska has a few communities with local bans and this issue was something that many local communities have discussed.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON added that the bans were in Bethel, Cordova, and Seward. Interestingly, Bethel and Cordova were leaders in banning plastic bags. He said these were local communities that worked through their city councils. He opined that the state would benefit from this type of restriction.

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REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND remarked that he was curious to how this proposed bill would potentially create opportunities for market alternatives. He asked what Representative Josephson has seen in the country when these restrictions go into place and what opportunities there were.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON responded that he shares Representative Holland thoughts and there could be new enterprises to adapt to the changing conditions. He noted that even Senator Dan Sullivan has been combatting plastic waste, particularly in the ocean. He said that there is a business in Anchorage that creates alternatives to linear recycling and briefly discussed the business. He said that he knows that people can adapt, and Juneau was a testament to that. He also said that a letter of support was available to highlight this.

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked how prevalent the use of styrofoam is in Alaska. She remarked that in Homer, the market demand has made changes to the type of food ware used. She said that she doesn't run into Styrofoam in her community and said she doesn't

recall the last time she used a Styrofoam cup. She also asked if it would impact the bottom line and whether local alternatives were available that have a reasonable price point.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON responded that he doesn't know how prevalent it is. He remarked that while visiting Shuyak Island in the Kodiak Archipelago, the beaches were covered in plastic that came from Asia. He said he views this bill as comparable to climate mitigation efforts in Alaska. He said that Alaska is certainly less than 1 percent of the problem and said the bill aims to further restrict this type of waste. He remarked that given his previous research; this bill is 1 of 100 steps that need to be taken to address plastic waste. He said lives have been easy and comfortable using Styrofoam and recognized that change may mean less convenience.

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REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked how this proposed bill would be enforced. She remarked on previous clean-up efforts on the Kodiak Archipelago and the vast amount of waste. She remarked that she was not sure how it would work.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON said that he would need to check DEC regulatory authority and remarked that HB 25 also would prevent the state from procuring these types of products. He said it is an outright restriction.

KEN ALPER, Staff, Representative Josephson, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Josephson, prime sponsor of HB 25, added that he did not have a direct answer. He remarked that this is a regulatory statute, and the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act deals with restrictions in Alaska. He did not know if it was complaint-based enforcement and did not know whether the Department of Environmental Conservation was conducting inspections or what the enforcement mechanism would be. He said that DEC would be contacted prior to the next hearing.

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CHAIR CARRICK remarked that looking at the impact of bioaccumulation and microplastics in mammal populations, this was a huge issue. She asked if Representative Josephson had any information or could follow-up with information regarding what proportions of bioaccumulation are a result from microplastics as opposed to other contaminants.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON responded that he was thinking about meetings with a professional in the last two years and remarked that had done research on this. He said studies on lakes, estuaries and other water bodies were conducted and that information could be forwarded. He said that one thing that is known is that the Arctic is a plastic sinkhole because of the movement of oceanic currents. He said someone would think that this area would be pristine, but in reality, it is not. He said research has been done on microplastics in general.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY remarked that the fiscal note didn't include any costs to DEC. She said that she understood that the department does not visit facilities as frequently as liked and this is a caution for enforceability. She asked what food service providers think of the proposed bill.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON responded that HB 25 was filed in the previous term, and he still needed to make those inquiries. He said that the research paperwork provided to the committee suggest that the American People are willing to make this adjustment and find alternatives.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY noted that many restaurants in the Juneau area have taken steps to use food ware that is more biodegradable. She said that she reached out to some industry members and felt there was some receptivity to this idea.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON asked if there was enough time for Mr. Alper to proceed with a PowerPoint presentation pertaining to the bill.

CHAIR CARRICK responded that there was not enough time remaining.

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REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON stated that there was an upcoming "lunch and learn" opportunity that discusses plastic pollution and its health implications. He noted that Ms. Pam Miller was an Alaska resident and professional expert on this issue and would be presenting for this event. He concluded that the current use of plastics is unsustainable.

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CHAIR CARRICK announced that HB 25 was held over.

[4:15:59 PM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 4:15 p.m.