

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

May 15, 2025

1:45 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Kelly Merrick, Chair
Senator Forrest Dunbar, Vice Chair
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
Senator Robert Yundt

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Donald Olson

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 58

"An Act relating to the office of public advocacy; and relating to the public advocate."

- MOVED HB 58 OUT OF COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 26(TRA) AM

"An Act relating to the duties of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; and relating to a statewide public and community transit plan."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 143

"An Act relating to the terms of office of municipal school board members; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 185

"An Act relating to the business of insurance; relating to exceptions to prohibited rebates; relating to the powers of the director of the division of insurance; relating to prohibited practices in the advertisement of insurance; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED SB 185 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 192

"An Act relating to evacuation designation levels; and relating to the Alaska Disaster Act."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 58

SHORT TITLE: OPA: PUBLIC ADVOCATE APPOINTMENT

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) FIELDS

01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	CRA, STA
03/11/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/11/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/11/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/13/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/13/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/13/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/18/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/18/25	(H)	Moved HB 58 Out of Committee
03/18/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/21/25	(H)	CRA RPT 4DP 1NR
03/21/25	(H)	DP: HOLLAND, HALL, HIMSCHOOT, MEARS
03/21/25	(H)	NR: PRAX
03/27/25	(H)	STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/27/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/27/25	(H)	MINUTE(STA)
03/29/25	(H)	STA AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/29/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/29/25	(H)	MINUTE(STA)
04/08/25	(H)	STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120
04/08/25	(H)	Moved HB 58 Out of Committee
04/08/25	(H)	MINUTE(STA)
04/09/25	(H)	STA RPT 5DP 2NR
04/09/25	(H)	DP: MOORE, HOLLAND, HIMSCHOOT, STORY, CARRICK
04/09/25	(H)	NR: VANCE, MCCABE
04/30/25	(H)	TRANSMITTED TO (S)
04/30/25	(H)	VERSION: HB 58
05/02/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
05/02/25	(S)	CRA, JUD
05/13/25	(S)	CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
05/13/25	(S)	Heard & Held
05/13/25	(S)	MINUTE(CRA)
05/15/25	(S)	CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: HB 26

SHORT TITLE: STATEWIDE PUBLIC & COMMUNITY TRANSIT PLAN

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) MINA

01/22/25 (H) PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25 (H) CRA, TRA
02/27/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
02/27/25 (H) Heard & Held
02/27/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
03/18/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/18/25 (H) Heard & Held
03/18/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
03/20/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/20/25 (H) Moved CSHB 26(CRA) Out of Committee
03/20/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
03/21/25 (H) CRA RPT CS(CRA) 4DP 1DNP 1AM
03/21/25 (H) DP: HOLLAND, HALL, HIMSCHOOT, MEARS
03/21/25 (H) DNP: PRAX
03/21/25 (H) AM: RUFFRIDGE
03/27/25 (H) TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
03/27/25 (H) Heard & Held
03/27/25 (H) MINUTE(TRA)
04/01/25 (H) TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
04/01/25 (H) Heard & Held
04/01/25 (H) MINUTE(TRA)
04/10/25 (H) TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
04/10/25 (H) Moved CSHB 26(TRA) Out of Committee
04/10/25 (H) MINUTE(TRA)
04/11/25 (H) TRA RPT CS(TRA) 5DP 2DNP
04/11/25 (H) DP: MOORE, MINA, STUTES, EISCHEID,
CARRICK
04/11/25 (H) DNP: MCCABE, TILTON
05/02/25 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
05/02/25 (H) VERSION: CSHB 26(TRA) AM
05/05/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
05/05/25 (S) CRA, TRA
05/15/25 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 143

SHORT TITLE: MUNICIPAL SCHOOL BOARD TERMS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) YUNDT

03/26/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/26/25 (S) EDC, CRA
04/09/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

04/09/25 (S) Heard & Held
 04/09/25 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
 05/05/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
 05/05/25 (S) Moved CSSB 143(EDC) Out of Committee
 05/05/25 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
 05/07/25 (S) EDC RPT CS 4NR 1DP SAME TITLE
 05/07/25 (S) NR: TOBIN, BJORKMAN, STEVENS, KIEHL
 05/07/25 (S) DP: CRONK
 05/15/25 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 185

SHORT TITLE: INSURANCE; REBATES; ADVERTISING
 SPONSOR(s): LABOR & COMMERCE

04/25/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 04/25/25 (S) CRA, L&C
 05/13/25 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
 05/13/25 (S) Heard & Held
 05/13/25 (S) MINUTE(CRA)
 05/15/25 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 192

SHORT TITLE: EVACUATION DESIGNATION LEVELS
 SPONSOR(s): BJORKMAN

05/12/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 05/12/25 (S) CRA, RES
 05/15/25 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS, District 17
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of HB 58.

HAHLEN BEHNKEN, Staff
 Representative Genevieve Mina
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced HB 26 on behalf of the sponsor.

REPRESENTATIVE GENEVIEVE MINA, District 19
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 26.

PATRICK REINHART, Executive Director
Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation in support of HB 26.

GERRY HOPE, Government Relations Director
Sitka Tribe of Alaska
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation in support of HB 26.

GEORGE HAYS, Deputy Borough Manager
Mat-Su Borough
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation in support of SB 143.

SAVAYA BIEBER, Staff
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a brief reintroduction of SB 185 on behalf of the Senate and Labor Commerce Committee, Senator Bjorkman, Chair.

SENATOR JESSE BJORKMAN, District D
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 192.

BRENDA AHLBERG, Emergency Manager
Kenai Peninsula Borough
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 192.

MICHELLE WESTON, Fire Chief
Girdwood Fire and Rescue
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 192.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:45:04 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK called the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:45 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Yundt, Gray-Jackson, Dunbar, and Chair Merrick.

HB 58-OPA: PUBLIC ADVOCATE APPOINTMENT

[1:45:45 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK announced the consideration of HOUSE BILL NO. 58 "An Act relating to the office of public advocacy; and relating to the public advocate."

[1:46:10 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS, District 17, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, said that HB 58 would change the selection process for the Public Advocate Director to match that of the Public Defender. He explained that the Alaska Legislature founded the Alaska Public Defender Agency in 1969 and the Office of Public Advocacy (OPA) in 1983. He surmised that the different selection processes likely resulted from an oversight. He briefly described the process the Alaska Judicial Council uses to select nominees for Public Defender; HB 58 would apply the same (or similar) process to the selection of the Public Advocacy Director. He stated that HB 58 would disallow arbitrary removal of the OPA Director and would require "for cause" removal. He noted that this is aligned with the requirements for the removal of the Public Defender. He added that both offices provide legal assistance to indigent Alaskans. He noted that OPA has broader authorities, including guardian ad litem. He stated that both agencies are important and offer significant cost savings to the State of Alaska. He emphasized that HB 58 is not a critique of the governor or OPA; rather, it is a forward-looking, good governance change that would protect the independence of the OPA director into the future.

[1:48:11 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK solicited the will of the committee.

[1:48:15 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR moved to report HB 58, work order 34-LS0011\A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s) and authorize Legislative Legal Services to make conforming changes.

[1:48:29 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK found no objection and HB 58 was reported from the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

[1:48:34 PM](#)

At ease.

HB 26-STATEWIDE PUBLIC & COMMUNITY TRANSIT PLAN

[1:49:56 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 26(TRA) am "An Act relating to the duties of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; and relating to a statewide public and community transit plan."

[1:50:11 PM](#)

At ease.

[1:51:00 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK reconvened the meeting.

[1:51:23 PM](#)

HAHLEN BEHNKEN, Staff, Representative Genevieve Mina, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, paraphrased the sponsor statement for HB 26:

[Original punctuation provided.]

CSHB 26 (TRA), Version I – Sponsor Statement
"An Act relating to the duties of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; and relating to a statewide public and community transit plan."

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) stewards the state's transportation system as the lead body in developing the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). HB 26 aims to support and secure accessible transportation options for all Alaskans by improving DOT&PF's public engagement process and broadening the study of transportation options across the state.

First, HB 26 seeks to improve DOT&PF's public engagement process in statewide transportation planning. Sufficient collaboration with local and regional entities is federally required to secure funding for transportation and infrastructure projects. HB 26 codifies this federal requirement by specifying that DOT&PF must coordinate with public, Tribal, and community transit programs in their development of Alaska's comprehensive, long-range, intermodal transportation plan (e.g., STIP). In this case, these transit programs refer to programs such as

Nome's Tribal Transit Program, Juneau's Capital Transit, Tok's Interior Alaska Bus Line, and Anchorage's People Mover.

Second, HB 26 expands DOT&PF's responsibility to study alternative transportation options by including rural and remote areas. DOT&PF is statutorily responsible for studying alternative means of transportation in Alaska, but they are currently only required to study urban areas. Alternative transportation methods, such as public transportation, are essential for those who do not have a car or cannot drive and provide more options for Alaskans and visitors to move around our state. According to a 2022 DOT&PF report on The Economic Value of Public Transit in Alaska, transit delivers benefits including increased business sales, less road congestion, less air pollution, and better travel times to Alaska communities.

Public transit is often the only transportation option for Alaskans with disabilities, low-income Alaskans, youth, and the elderly. Securing federal funding and improving access to public and community transit is essential to connect all Alaskans to their jobs, schools, healthcare, and communities. HB 26 improves the annual study, reporting, and development of Alaska's multimodal transportation network.

[1:53:38 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GENEVIEVE MINA, District 19, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, added that the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education and the Alaska Mobility Coalition requested HB 26. She emphasized that people with disabilities face gaps in access to public transportation. She said HB 26 would codify the practices of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF) while ensuring that those impacted by public transit are part of the transit access conversation.

[1:54:24 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK announced invited testimony on HB 26.

[1:54:38 PM](#)

PATRICK REINHART, Executive Director, Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, Anchorage, Alaska, said the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education is one of the founding members of the Alaska Mobility Coalition. He has

been a disability advocate in Alaska for 40 years. He stated that transportation problems are a daily challenge for people with disabilities in Alaska. He noted that the same is true for senior citizens, as both populations rely heavily on public transportation. He briefly discussed public transportation in communities around the state, pointing out that some communities (e.g. Anchorage) have robust public transit systems, while others have no reliable public transit. He briefly discussed human services grants. He stated that this grant program has successfully started many small public transit systems. He noted a low number of current human service grant applicants. He surmised that this is related to a lack of planning for public transit in small, rural communities. He added that it is difficult for small communities to apply for the grants, which are a combination of state and federal funding. He opined that better planning from DOTPF and input from the impacted community would be beneficial.

[1:54:41 PM](#)

MR. REINHART said DOTPF recently received an influx of federal funding for rural transit projects; however, DOTPF distributed those funds to existing programs despite community support for new transit programs. He asserted that this was a lost opportunity. He emphasized the importance of planning. He said that a state transit conference would be helpful and could be part of DOTPF's planning process. He emphasized the importance of making this a statutory requirement and of communicating the importance of public transportation in Alaska.

[2:00:25 PM](#)

GERRY HOPE, Government Relations Director, Sitka Tribe of Alaska, Sitka, Alaska, said HB 26 is a 2025 legislative priority for Sitka Tribe of Alaska. He explained that Sitka Tribe of Alaska operates public transit in Sitka and is a member of the Alaska Mobility Coalition. He said it is difficult to get DOTPF to recognize challenges that are not in statute. He noted that HB 26 identifies some items in simple language. He directed attention to HB 26, page 1, line 15, which adds "including public, tribal, and community transit programs." He then directed attention to HB 26, page 2, lines 5-6, which adds language to create transit systems through coordination with local governments and tribal entities. He emphasized that these are critically important changes that would make an important difference in the way Sitka Tribe of Alaska works with DOTPF. It would also impact the delivery of public transit services within communities across the state.

[2:02:55 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK opened public testimony on HB 26; finding none, she closed public testimony.

[2:03:17 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA stressed the importance of public transportation across the state. She noted that previous amendments to HB 26 incorporated different facets of public transportation, including ferries and potentially including commuter rail. She emphasized the importance of including all communities in Alaska.

[2:03:48 PM](#)

[CHAIR MERRICK held HB 26 in committee.]

[2:03:51 PM](#)

At ease.

SB 143-MUNICIPAL SCHOOL BOARD TERMS

[CSSB 143(EDC) was before the committee.]

[2:04:52 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 143 "An Act relating to the terms of office of municipal school board members; and providing for an effective date."

[2:05:08 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT, speaking as sponsor, said SB 143 is a local control issue addressing school board term length. He explained that currently, Alaskan communities can choose terms of office (3- or 4-year terms) for mayor and assembly; however, the school board is limited to 3 years. SB 143 would change extend the 3- or 4-year option to school board terms. This would eliminate off-year elections in communities that have chosen 4-year terms for local assembly and mayoral elections. He stated that this would provide a financial savings and streamline the electoral process. He emphasized that this would allow local communities to choose the term length. He noted that local governments could not change the term length without ballot approval.

[2:06:34 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK announced invited testimony on SB 143.

[2:06:49 PM](#)

GEORGE HAYS, Deputy Borough Manager, Mat-Su Borough, Palmer, Alaska, said SB 143 proposes a simple, yet significant change by allowing municipal governments to determine (by ordinance) the terms of office for municipal school board members. This strengthens local control, promotes flexibility, and allows municipalities to tailor governance to the needs of the community. He noted that state law allows municipalities to change mayoral and assembly term length. He explained that the Mat-Su Borough recently changed its mayoral and assembly terms to coincide with the state and federal elections. A 4-year school board term would match up with these, which would greatly improve voter turnout. He outlined the following three reasons why SB 143 matters for local governments:

1. SB 143 would significantly enhance local control.
 - Municipalities across the state vary greatly in population, geography, and local priorities. SB 143 provides local governing bodies to set local school terms that align with local needs and electoral cycles.
2. SB 143 supports community engagement.
 - In some cases, adjusting term lengths may improve voter turnout, streamline elections, and/or increase interest in school board service.
3. SB 143 promotes administrative efficiency.
 - Aligning school board terms with other local election cycles has the potential to greatly reduce costs and administrative burdens. This would create more efficient government operations.

MR. HAYS noted that SB 143 gives municipalities the option of changing school board term length. He emphasized that the changes made by this legislation would still be subject to local ordinance processes, including public input, transparency, and accountability. He stated that trusting municipalities to make these decisions reinforces the value of local governments while empowering communities to build stronger, more responsive institutions.

[2:09:53 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK opened public testimony on SB 143; finding none, she closed public testimony.

[2:10:15 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT explained the impetus for SB 143. He said that [in the Mat-Su Borough] odd-year elections have seen voter turnout rates of 9-14 percent. Shifting to even-year elections (i.e. holding all elections on the same 4-year cycle) increased voter turnout to 48 percent. He said that holding all elections on even years would create more ease for voters (thus increasing voter turnout) and would save municipalities money.

[2:10:53 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK held SB 143 in committee.

[2:10:56 PM](#)

At ease.

SB 185-INSURANCE; REBATES; ADVERTISING

[2:11:48 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 185 "An Act relating to the business of insurance; relating to exceptions to prohibited rebates; relating to the powers of the director of the division of insurance; relating to prohibited practices in the advertisement of insurance; and providing for an effective date."

[2:12:12 PM](#)

SAVAYA BIEBER, Staff, Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, paraphrased the sponsor statement for SB 185:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 185 Insurance; Rebates; Advertising
Sponsor Statement
Version N

Senate Bill 185 updates Alaska's insurance statutes to provide clarity and flexibility around allowable business practices. This legislation aligns Alaska's statutes with national best practices and the NAIC Model Act.

SB 185 modernizes Alaska's anti-rebating laws by clearly defining exceptions for value-added services, wellness incentives, educational tools, and low-value promotional gifts. It ensures that insurers and

producers can offer beneficial programs to the consumer, such as programs including health apps, risk reduction tools, or financial wellness services.

Under this bill, insurers may also run pilot programs, provide charitable donations, or host raffles, provided they follow strict fairness and transparency guidelines. Additionally, the legislation provides consumer protection by prohibiting deceptive marketing claims that suggest insurance is free or that one policy is being offered solely to induce the purchase of another.

SB 185 promotes innovation, supports consumer engagement, and levels the playing field for insurers operating in multiple states. This bill ensures Alaskans have access to modern insurance services while maintaining strong consumer protections.

I urge support of Senate Bill 185 to ensure Alaska remains aligned with national standards while serving the best interests of consumers and the industry alike.

MS. BIEBER said that SB 185 would align Alaska with national insurance standards, adding the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act to the statutory list of federal laws governing trade practices and fraud.

[2:13:06 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK opened public testimony on SB 185; finding none, she closed public testimony.

[2:13:20 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK solicited a motion.

[2:13:25 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR moved to report SB 185, work order 34-LS0721\N, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[2:13:43 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK found no objection and SB 185 was reported from the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

[2:13:45 PM](#)

At ease.

SB 192-EVACUATION DESIGNATION LEVELS

[2:15:28 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 192 "An Act relating to evacuation designation levels; and relating to the Alaska Disaster Act."

[2:15:45 PM](#)

SENATOR JESSE BJORKMAN, District D, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, said that emergency managers around the state requested SB 192. He explained that this would create a statewide uniform standard of emergency communication and evacuation. This would clarify what Alaskans need to do in an emergency and when evacuation is needed.

[2:16:49 PM](#)

BRENDA AHLBERG, Emergency Manager, Kenai Peninsula Borough, Soldotna, Alaska, introduced herself. She emphasized the importance of unified evacuation messaging across the state. She said the information in the presentation is from the Kenai Peninsula's "Ready, Set, Go!" program. While these products are available to all jurisdictions (and have been shared with 5 municipalities to date), SB 192 would not mandate the use of these products.

[2:17:18 PM](#)

MS. AHLBERG moved to slide 2 and discussed the importance of statewide standards:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Statewide Standards

Standardizing wildfire evacuation messaging across Alaska will minimize confusion during public alert and warning phases, helping save lives. Standardized evacuation maps clearly demonstrate closed areas, something that becomes even more important when there are multiple wildfires in close proximity across the landscape.

Level 1 Ready An emergency may exist in the area

Level 2 Set Evacuation of the area is imminent

Level 3 Go! A dangerous hazard exists ... Evacuation now!

[2:18:24 PM](#)

MS. AHLBERG moved to slide 3 and discussed the importance of being ready for an emergency:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Level 1 - Be Ready

Be aware. Be prepared. Promote cross-cultural perspectives of being in a "ready state" that encourages the public to be part of response as well as recovery.

Level 1 - Ready phase provides tips and templates for helping the public with a variety of preparedness topics.

Who are our vulnerable populations at Level 1?

1-Ready 2-Set 3-Go!

Take steps now to prepare for emergencies and hazards.

Protect your home: How will I receive emergency alerts and warnings?

Create a Plan: Where will I go for shelter in an emergency?

Gather Supplies: How do I prepare my household to be self-sufficient for 7 days?

Create Connections: How will my family communicate during an emergency?

MS. AHLBERG commented that Alaskans are resilient, independent, and value helping each other. She said that those new to Alaska are one vulnerable population at Level 1, as they do not always understand the challenges of living in Alaska - particularly when it comes to natural disasters. She said that the Ready, Set, Go! program includes preparedness and outreach in addition to wildfire designations.

[2:19:22 PM](#)

MS. AHLBERG moved to slide 4, and discussed Level 2:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Level 2 - Get Set

Often the public cannot decide when to evacuate during Level 2 phase, particularly when messaging continues to imply "be ready to evacuate."

Messaging needs to stress actions that must be completed in this phase, i.e. bags packed, plans shared, shelter location identified.

Level 2 - Get Set: also encourage early evacuation for those that need extra time to leave the area.

Leaving early isn't just for folks with mobility issues, who or what else should leave now?

1-Ready **2-Set** 3-Go!

Be ready to evacuate

- Have your bags packed and your plans made.
- Go now if you or a loved one need extra time!
- Move livestock or recreational vehicles.

MS. AHLBERG said that level 2 is designated by yellow. She said that level 2 indicates imminent danger. Residents can elect to leave during this time. This early warning is beneficial for those who need extra time to evacuate (e.g. those with mobility issues, or who need to move livestock and/or recreational vehicles). She said that, historically, 50 percent of the population has elected to leave during the level 2 phase.

[2:20:06 PM](#)

MS. AHLBERG moved to slide 5, and discussed Level 3:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Level 3 - Go!

Take the "PLEASE" out of the message. The urgency of leaving an evacuated area must be clear, concise and assertive. Keeping the public out of the evacuated area can also be challenging.

GO now! Evacuate the area now!

This bill does not amend the State of Alaska "Right-to-Stay" law.

Go! Evacuate Now!

1-Ready 2-Set **3-Go!**

Grab your keys, kits, and Go!

- **Follow recommended evacuation routes.**
- **Go to your nearest shelter or away from the danger.**
- **Stay Alert!**

MS. AHLBERG emphasized that at Level 3 leaving is urgent. She expressed hope that the messaging provided during outreach and preparedness venues would have impressed upon residents the importance of this phase. She noted that Alaska law prevents mandatory evacuations; however, at Level 3, residents are urged to leave dangerous areas.

[2:20:50 PM](#)

MS. AHLBERG moved to slide 6, and briefly discussed management action points as they relate to operational maps:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Management Action Points Operationalized

Ready - Level 1

Set - Level 2

Go! - Level 3

MS. AHLBERG suggested that this would help to clarify why SB 143 is necessary for the standardization of evacuation maps and messaging.

[2:21:14 PM](#)

MS. AHLBERG moved to slide 7 and discussed how the current use of red and green cause confusion. [Slide 7 contains 3 maps to illustrate how the colors green, yellow, and red are used to communicate the action level of a particular area.] She shared an anecdote to illustrate that people tend to see red as indicating danger and necessary evacuation. However, green was used to indicate closed areas during a recent Denali borough fire. This led to confusion. She said the emergency manager for the Denali Borough shared that he developed a greater understanding of why red should be used to indicate closed or evacuated areas.

[2:22:11 PM](#)

MS. AHLBERG moved to slide 8 and offered examples of areas in the Pacific Northwest that that uses red to define closed areas. Those areas also use the Ready, Set, Go! program. In that program, Level 1 is green, Level 2 is yellow, and Level 3 is red.

[2:22:51 PM](#)

MS. AHLBERG moved to slide 9 and provided Alaska Evacuation Examples from 2019 to 2024. [Slide 9 contains maps from the 2019 Swan Lake fire; 2022 Minto Lake fire; 2023 Lost Horses Creek; 2023 McCoy Creek fire; and 2024 McDonald fire.] Unified mapping indicated closed areas in red. She said this was a successful campaign across the landscape.

[2:23:08 PM](#)

MS. AHLBERG moved to slide 10 and discussed re-entry:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Learn When to Return

Areas or streets colored green indicate safe access for phased re-entry. Red indicates closed areas to the public.

Multiple resources utilized to distribute unified messaging, i.e. shelters, R911, radio, social media, phone trees, static media, traplines, etc.

Continued coordinated messaging with utility companies, solid waste, roads and other cooperators as neighborhoods are reopened.

MS AHLBERG explained that in some instances, areas may be partially reentered, but still be closed. Utility outages and roadway closures may result in some areas remaining inaccessible. In these instances, the Ready, Set, Go! program uses red to indicate closed areas and green to indicate open areas.

[2:24:26 PM](#)

MS. AHLBERG moved to slide 11 and explained that the examples provided are from the Kenai Peninsula Borough's products. Slide 11 contains a QR code for additional information and to access those products.

[2:25:08 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK opened public testimony on SB 192.

[2:25:25 PM](#)

MICHELLE WESTON, Fire Chief, Girdwood Fire and Rescue, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 192. She said she is also serving as the liaison officer with the Alaska Incident Management Team (AIMT) - Search and Rescue (SAR), where she coordinates evacuations with local governments. She mentioned her experience working in active evacuations and planning in other states. She expressed her support of SB 192 and said this would set Alaska up for success. She emphasized the importance of uniform evacuation protocols, particularly when tourists are moving through different areas and jurisdictions that currently use different colors to indicate what action should be taken in an emergency. She shared her belief that having clear guidelines and uniform messaging is very important.

[2:26:58 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK closed public testimony on SB 192.

[2:27:04 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN expressed appreciation for the committee's consideration of SB 192, which would unify alert messaging across the state in the event of a fire or other natural disaster.

[2:27:30 PM](#)

[CHAIR MERRICK held SB 192 in committee.]

[2:27:31 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Merrick adjourned the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 2:27 p.m.