

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

May 5, 2025

3:43 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Mike Cronk

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 181

"An Act relating to disclosure of information obtained by the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to other state agencies."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 8

"An Act relating to public school students who are deaf or hard of hearing."

- MOVED CSSB 8(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 143

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

- MOVED CSSB 143(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 181

SHORT TITLE: EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION DISCLOSURE

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF TASK FORCE EVAL ALASKA SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

04/22/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS

04/22/25 (S) EDC, L&C
04/30/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
04/30/25 (S) -- MEETING CANCELED --
05/05/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 8

SHORT TITLE: EDUCATION FOR DEAF & HEARING IMPAIRED
SPONSOR(s): GRAY-JACKSON

01/22/25 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25 (S) EDC, FIN
04/09/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
04/09/25 (S) Heard & Held
04/09/25 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
04/30/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
04/30/25 (S) -- MEETING CANCELED --
05/05/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 143

SHORT TITLE: MUNICIPAL SCHOOL BOARD TERMS
SPONSOR(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)

WITNESS REGISTER

TIM LAMKIN, Staff
Senator Gary Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced SB 181.

BRETT WATSON, Assistant Professor
Applied and Natural Resource Economics
Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 181.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 181.

PALOMA HARBOUR, Director
Division of Employment and Training Services
Department of Labor and Workforce Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of the fiscal note for SB 181.

MIKE MASON, Staff
Senator Löki Tobin
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an explanation of changes for SB 143, version A to version N.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:43:08 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:43 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Bjorkman, Stevens, Kiehl, and Chair Tobin. Senator Cronk arrived thereafter.

SB 181-EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION DISCLOSURE

[3:45:12 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 181 "An Act relating to disclosure of information obtained by the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to other state agencies."

[3:45:33 PM](#)

SENATOR GARY STEVENS speaking as sponsor of SB 181 stated that SB 181 is a data sharing bill recommended by the Joint Legislative Taskforce that evaluated Alaska's seafood industry. He noted that Senator Kiehl, Senator Bjorkman, and himself served on the taskforce. He explained that the bill facilitates collaboration between the University of Alaska and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to provide economists, scientists, and policymakers with long-term, cross-sector program outcome data. He emphasized that the bill helps assess return on investment in education and workforce development programs, supporting more targeted and efficient resource allocation.

[3:46:04 PM](#)

SENATOR CRONK arrived at the meeting.

[3:47:31 PM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, stated that SB 181 is one of several recommendations resulting from the Joint Legislative Taskforce. He noted that experts that participated in the taskforce hearings and support the passage of SB 181 are available to provide testimony.

[3:48:09 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced invited testimony on SB 181.

[3:48:26 PM](#)

BRETT WATSON, Assistant Professor, Applied and Natural Resource Economics, Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 181:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

For the Record, I am Dr Brett Watson, an economist at the University of Alaska Anchorage's Institute of Social and Economic Research-ISER.

I'm testifying in support of SB 181, which would streamline data access for researchers working on Alaska-specific policy issues.

As you know, Alaska's communities are unique-geographically, economically, and socially. But the data we rely on to understand these communities is often either too broad or not timely enough. Federal sources like the US Census or the Bureau of Labor Statistics struggle to give us reliable information in our rural communities because their sample sizes are just too small or their coverage too broad.

The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, on the other hand, maintains data that is more specific, more accurate, and more timely. Researchers at ISER have used this data in the past-but the process is cumbersome. We have to send staff to Juneau, negotiate custom agreements, and go through multiple layers of legal and procurement approvals. This takes time, money, and effort on both sides-and it slows down our ability to respond to the needs of the state.

SB 181 would fix that.

It allows the University and the Department of Labor to collaborate more efficiently, removing hurdles while still protecting data confidentiality. ISER has a long track record of handling sensitive data securely. All our researchers follow rigorous Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols. With improved access, we could more rapidly conduct research that supports better decision-making.

I've included as part of my written submission a memo more fully outlining how research collaboration might work, and an example of how we leveraged a past collaboration to understand the economic multiplier effects of fishing in Alaska's coastal communities - I hope these will provide further evidence for the value of action on this legislation.

SB 181 gives us a smart, cost-effective way to unlock the value of existing data, improve research quality, and support good policymaking.

I urge you to support the bill, and I thank you for your time.

[3:52:05 PM](#)

DAN ROBINSON, Research Chief, Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Juneau, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 181, stating the data referenced in SB 181 originates from the Department of Labor and Workforce Development through state unemployment insurance laws, with nearly all Alaska employers submitting quarterly reports detailing worker Social Security numbers, employment, and wages. He explained that although the data is primarily used to operate the unemployment insurance system, it is also highly valuable for research, and his group, the Research and Analysis Section, cleans and matches the data for statutorily required projects such as the annual nonresident worker report. He noted that Alaska's data is particularly rich due to the Permanent Fund Dividend and other factors, and while other states offer microdata access more broadly to researchers, Alaska's statutes are unusually restrictive. He added that despite these limits, the data is already used for purposes like verifying public assistance and enforcing child support. He concluded that SB 181 would allow qualified researchers greater access to support meaningful studies.

[3:55:08 PM](#)

PALOMA HARBOUR, Director, Division of Employment and Training Services, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Juneau, Alaska, paraphrased the fiscal note summary for SB 181:

[Original punctuation provided.]

This legislation would allow the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) to share information with the University of Alaska (UA) for program evaluation and improvement, educational outreach, or public policy research. It requires a written agreement between UA and DOLWD to ensure the data is handled in compliance with state and federal requirements.

UA will need to cover any costs associated with the sharing of data because the federal grant that supports the program under which this data is gathered cannot be used for costs associated with disclosures. Until DOLWD has entered into an agreement with UA on the type of data to be shared and the frequency of that sharing, DOLWD cannot say exactly how much this will cost. Based on similar agreements with other state agencies, this could cost from \$1,300 to \$46,500

The department has sufficient interagency receipt authority in its budget to cover the cost of this new agreement if it falls within that range.

[3:56:59 PM](#)

MR. LAMKIN thanked the committee for hearing SB 181.

[3:57:09 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN opened public testimony on SB 181; finding none, she closed public testimony.

[3:57:26 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN held SB 181 in committee.

SB 8-EDUCATION FOR DEAF & HEARING IMPAIRED

[3:57:43 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 8 "An Act relating to public school students who are deaf or hard of hearing."

CHAIR TOBIN stated the committee first heard the bill on April 9, 2025, and adopted a committee substitute, version N. She noted SB 8 has a zero fiscal note.

[3:58:01 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN solicited the will of the committee.

[3:58:08 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to report CSSB 8, work order 34-LS0075\N, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[3:58:23 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN found no objection and CSSB 8(EDC) was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

SB 143-MUNICIPAL SCHOOL BOARD TERMS

[3:58:39 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN 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."

CHAIR TOBIN stated this was the second bill hearing for SB 143. SB 143 has a zero fiscal note.

[3:59:12 PM](#)

MIKE MASON, Staff, Senator Löki Tobin, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided an explanation of changes for SB 143, version A to version N.

[Original punctuation provided.]

Senate Bill 143 - Municipal School Board Terms **Explanation of Changes - Version A to Version N**

Section 3 - The phrase "approved by the voters" was added to the sentence that begins on page 1, line 14. As a result, a vote of the people would be required before the governing body of a municipality can alter the terms of office for school board members.

[3:59:37 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN solicited a motion.

[3:59:38 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to adopt the committee substitute (CS) for SB 143, work order 34-LS0781\N, as the working document.

[3:59:55 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN found no objection and CSSB 143 was adopted as the working document.

[4:00:09 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN solicited the will of the committee.

[4:00:17 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to report CSSB 143, work order 34-LS0781\N, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[4:00:31 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN found no objection and CSSB 143(EDC) was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[4:01:08 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 4:01 p.m.