

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

May 9, 2025

3:32 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

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S): UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA BOARD OF REGENTS

University of Alaska Board of Regents
Fernando Escobar - Kodiak

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

SENATE BILL NO. 181

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

- MOVED SB 181 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 151

"An Act relating to head lice in public schools."

- MOVED CSSB 151(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)
05/05/25 (S) Heard & Held
05/05/25 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
05/09/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 151

SHORT TITLE: SCHOOL DISTRICT HEAD LICE POLICY
SPONSOR(s): BJORKMAN

03/28/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/28/25 (S) EDC, FIN
04/11/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
04/11/25 (S) -- MEETING CANCELED --
04/14/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
04/14/25 (S) Heard & Held
04/14/25 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
05/09/25 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

FERNANDO ESCOBAR, Appointee
University of Alaska Board of Regents
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

ELEANOR GUTHRIE, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the governor's appointee Mr. Escobar to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

PAT JACOBSON, representing self
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of governor appointee Mr. Escobar to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

BETTY WALTERS, representing self
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the governor's appointee Mr. Escobar to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

SAVAYA BIEBER, Staff

Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented Senate Bill 151: School District Head Lice Policy.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:32:29 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:32 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Bjorkman, Cronk, Stevens, Kiehl, and Chair Tobin.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S):
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA BOARD OF REGENTS

[3:34:35 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of governor appointee Fernando Escobar to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

[3:35:05 PM](#)

FERNANDO ESCOBAR, Appointee, University of Alaska Board of Regents, Kodiak, Alaska, testified as the governor's appointee to the University of Alaska Board of Regents. He stated he was born and raised in Kodiak and is currently attending the University of Alaska - Fairbanks (UAF) as a first-generation student. He said he is actively involved in student government and campus life. He is currently the Director of Student Advocacy and Public Relations. He shared that public service is a fundamental principle of his teaching philosophy and noted he has contributed time to juvenile delinquents, student advocacy, and community service. He said appointment as the next student regent is an honor and he is excited to continue assisting his peers in a new capacity.

[3:35:58 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated he knows most of the members on the Board of Regents. He asked whether Mr. Escobar is comfortable working with older people and how he would handle a situation where he disagreed with other members of the board.

[3:36:45 PM](#)

MR. ESCOBAR stated that the student regent's focus centers on presenting the student voice and ensuring the Regents understand the perspectives of 18,000 or more students. Escobar said he would express concerns and opposition to motions that could

negatively affect the system but ultimately respect and support the Board's final decisions. He emphasized collaboration to advance student success and to support staff and faculty, particularly amid federal challenges in education. Escobar added that Regents and students must work together to properly voice, address, and understand concerns.

[3:38:04 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL thanked Mr. Escobar for his willingness to serve as the only representative member of the Board of Regents. He asked Mr. Escobar what role he sees the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) playing within the broader University of Alaska (UA) system.

[3:39:11 PM](#)

MR. ESCOBAR responded that UAS should strengthen its focus on marine sciences, which he identified as a leading program within the system. He said UAS should align programs with workforce and industry needs, including expanding opportunities for students in fields such as welding and scuba diving. He encouraged expanding partnerships within Alaska and with institutions in the Lower-48 to enhance research and industry collaboration in marine sciences. He concluded that marine sciences should anchor UAS's future growth and role within the UA ecosystem.

[3:40:47 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN opened public testimony on the confirmation of Mr. Escobar.

[3:41:11 PM](#)

ELEANOR GUTHRIE, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of governor appointee Mr. Escobar to the University of Alaska Board of Regents. She introduced herself as Associate Director of the University of Alaska - Fairbanks Honors College and described meeting him at the 2024 Honors College orientation, where she identified him as a future leader. She highlighted his leadership during the Climate Policy in Action intensive in Juneau, where he helped lead 16 legislative and agency meetings focused on renewable energy, blue economy, and sustainable agriculture. She said he demonstrated professionalism and policy insight. She stated that he brings policy expertise, authentic leadership, and commitment to the University of Alaska system and urged confirmation.

[3:43:09 PM](#)

PAT JACOBSON, representing self, Kodiak, Alaska, testified in support of governor appointee Mr. Escobar to the University of

Alaska Board of Regents. She introduced herself as a 55-year Kodiak resident, retired teacher, and former eight-year member of the UA Board of Regents, and outlined the qualities expected of a student regent, including professionalism, preparation, respect, and active participation. She stated that he demonstrates those qualities, shows maturity, strong work ethic, and dedication, and remains actively involved in academic and extracurricular activities at UAF, including the Honors Student Advisory Council, Anthropological Society, and Pre-Law Club. She expressed confidence that he will serve the UA system and the state exceptionally well and recommended confirmation.

[3:45:17 PM](#)

BETTY WALTERS, representing self, Kodiak, Alaska, testified in support of the governor's appointee Mr. Escobar to the University of Alaska Board of Regents. She introduced herself as a Kodiak community member, educator, and volunteer, and stated that she has known Mr. Escobar since high school and observed his growth through academic and community involvement. She described him as capable, dependable, inquisitive, and committed. She stated in the interest of time her written testimony was submitted to the committee giving further examples of Mr. Escobar's qualifications and urging support for his appointment.

[3:46:36 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN closed public testimony.

SENATOR STEVENS stated Ms. Jacobson, former Regent, and Ms. Walters, former superintendent, are two of his favorite people. They have provided great leadership in education for Kodiak. He said he is pleased to hear they support Mr. Escobar.

[3:47:04 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN solicited a motion.

[3:47:07 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved Fernando Escobar, appointee to the University of Alaska Board of Regents, be advanced to a Joint Session of the legislature for consideration.

University of Alaska Board of Regents
Fernando Escobar - Kodiak

SENATOR STEVENS reminded members that signing the report(s) regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects individual members' approval or disapproval of the

appointees; the nominations are merely advanced to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[3:47:28 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN stated that [in accordance with AS 39.05.080,] Mr. Escobar's name would be forwarded to a full session of the legislature.

SB 181-EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION DISCLOSURE

[3:47:38 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."

CHAIR TOBIN stated SB 181 was sponsored by the Senate Rules Committee at the request of the Joint Taskforce on Evaluating Alaska's Seafood Industry. Chair of the taskforce was President Stevens. This is the second hearing and no amendments were received. She stated it is her intent to move the bill from committee. She found no objection.

[3:48:06 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN solicited the will of the committee.

[3:48:08 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to report SB 181, work order 34-LS0921\A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[3:48:21 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN found no objection and SB 181 was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

SB 151-SCHOOL DISTRICT HEAD LICE POLICY

[3:48:39 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 151 "An Act relating to head lice in public schools."

CHAIR TOBIN stated this is the second hearing of SB 151 and the committee would hear a committee substitute (CS) for SB 151, workorder 34-LS0709\O.

[3:49:12 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN speaking as sponsor of SB 151 said he and staff would offer a brief presentation to explain the changes to the bill and share alarming treatment choices that some schools are using for pinkeye.

[3:49:48 PM](#)

SAVAYA BIEBER, Staff, Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, co-presented SB 151: School District Head Lice Policy. She moved to slide [2], SB 151 Explanation of Changes version H to version O:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**SB 151 School District Head Lice Policy
Explanation of Changes
Version H to Version O**

Section 1: Delete all material and insert a new section AS 14.30.144 requiring school districts adopt a policy regarding students with lice and students with bacterial conjunctivitis.

Section 2: Amends AS 14.30.144 by adding new subsections stating school districts who have not adopted a policy under section 1 of the bill shall follow the default policy established in this section regarding lice and bacterial conjunctivitis.

Section 3: Provides an effective date for section 2 of the bill, section 2 will be enacted 180 days after the effective date of section 1.

MS. BIEBER outlined the changes made in the committee substitute. She stated the O version of the bill removed the school district reimbursement provisions, reporting requirements, and lice checks. She said the committee substitute essentially deleted the prior version of the bill and replaced it.

MS. BIEBER stated SB 151 now requires school districts to adopt a policy regarding head lice and bacterial conjunctivitis, also known as pink eye. She explained that districts that have not adopted a policy would be required to follow the default policy established in the bill. She stated the policy for head lice remains the same. Students found with lice may finish the school day but may not return until a school nurse or designee confirms the absence of live head lice.

MS. BIEBER stated that students found with bacterial conjunctivitis must leave the classroom immediately and may return at least 24 hours after beginning treatment.

MS. BIEBER stated that when head lice or pink eye are confirmed, the school shall notify parents that a student in their child's class was found to have lice or pink eye. She noted that notifications must be provided in a manner that protects each student's privacy.

3:51:06 PM

SENATOR BJORKMAN stated he had hoped the original version of the bill would both prevent the spread of lice in schools and provide support for funding nurses in schools serving grades K through 8. He explained that given current fiscal realities, that component could not move forward. He stated the committee substitute streamlines SB 151 and eliminates fiscal liability for school districts. He explained that schools are no longer required to conduct schoolwide lice checks and would instead address lice cases on a case-by-case basis. He stated SB 151 also adds guidance regarding bacterial conjunctivitis, commonly known as pink eye.

3:52:05 PM

SENATOR BJORKMAN moved to side 3, What is Bacterial Conjunctivitis:

[Original punctuation provided.]

What is Bacterial Conjunctivitis?

- Inflammation of the conjunctiva
- Highly contagious
- Can be identified by redness, irritation, yellow or greenish discharge, crusting of eyelids, dryness, itchiness, and puffy or swollen eyes
- Severe cases can lead to ulcers on the eye and loss of vision

SENATOR BJORKMAN emphasized that the bill establishes a backstop policy and primarily requires districts to adopt their own policies addressing lice and bacterial conjunctivitis. He stated the legislation encourages districts to enact policies tailored to their communities. He noted the policies would not apply to

correspondence programs and that boarding schools and residential schools would require separate policies. He stated schools would be responsible for adopting policies appropriate to their specific circumstances.

SENATOR BJORKMAN explained that bacterial conjunctivitis is the more severe form of pink eye and spreads quickly among young children. He stated that following the first hearing on the bill, he was contacted by several teachers who expressed concern about how pink eye was being handled in schools. He explained there are two types of pink eye: viral and bacterial. He stated viral conjunctivitis is uncomfortable but does not spread as readily and does not involve the thick discharge associated with bacterial conjunctivitis. He stated bacterial conjunctivitis can be painful and, if left untreated, can lead to ulcers and potential vision loss. He added that it poses additional risk if transmitted to infants at home.

[3:53:57 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN moved to slide 4, How Does Bacterial Conjunctivitis Spread:

[Original punctuation provided.]

How Does Bacterial Conjunctivitis Spread?

- Close personal contact such as touching or shaking hands
- Touching objects and surfaces with germs on them
- Large respiratory tract droplets from an infected person
- Caused by bacterial infections

SENATOR BJORKMAN stated pink eye spreads through surface contact. He explained that transmission can occur when a person touches their eye, then touches a surface, and another person touches that surface and then their eye.

[3:54:15 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN moved to slide 5, CDC Recommendations:

[Original punctuation provided.]

CDC Recommendations

- Considered contagious 24 hours after beginning treatment
- Students with pink eye should leave the classroom immediately and may return at least 24 hours after beginning treatment

SENATOR BJORKMAN stated the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends treating bacterial conjunctivitis with antibiotic eye drops. He explained that under the bill, a student found to have pink eye must leave the classroom immediately, begin treatment, and may return 24 hours after starting treatment when no longer contagious.

[3:54:44 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN moved to slide 6, How to Treat Bacterial Conjunctivitis:

[Original punctuation provided.]

How to Treat Bacterial Conjunctivitis

- Antibiotics
- Eye drops or ointments
- Washing eyelids and lashes regularly
- Avoiding contact lenses

SENATOR BJORKMAN added that individuals should avoid wearing contact lenses, wash their hands regularly, and consider designating a separate bathroom at home for an infected individual.

[3:55:04 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN moved to slide 7 showing types of conjunctivitis and asked if there were questions.

[3:55:08 PM](#)

SENATOR CRONK asked whether Senator Bjorkman's district lacked policies addressing lice and pink eye.

[3:55:22 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN responded that different practices have been adopted across schools in the state, resulting in confusion and

concern. He stated that in some instances, students have remained in class with pink eye or live lice and that parents have not always been notified when cases occur. He stated this has raised concerns among parents who want the opportunity to speak with their children about precautions such as handwashing and avoiding shared personal items. He referenced discussions and screenshots from communities including Fairbanks and the Kenai Peninsula indicating concern about inconsistent practices. He stated some of the differing approaches stem from guidance from national school nurse associations that may not align with other medical advice.

[3:56:30 PM](#)

SENATOR CRONK stated that he generally supports local control regarding policies, curriculum, and courses. He opined that this matter should remain within local school board authority but understands that they sometimes need direction.

SENATOR BJORKMAN responded that SB 151 preserves local control by providing six months for districts to adopt their own policies through a public process that includes input from parents and community members. He stated that if a district does not act, the default policy in the bill would apply. He reiterated that the legislation requires districts to adopt a policy addressing lice and pink eye, with the bill serving as a backstop if they fail to do so.

[3:57:50 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS stated he understood there is a difference between lice and pink eye and that one may be more contagious than the other. He stated it seemed logical that in both cases a child should be removed from school and sent home. He asked why students with lice are allowed to remain in school for the remainder of the day despite lice being contagious.

[3:58:09 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN replied that CDC guidance provides that a child with lice does not need to leave immediately and may remain in school until the end of the day. He stated the student may return after treatment once no live lice are present.

[3:58:32 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL stated that in his view the distinction relates to potential harm. He noted that while both conditions are contagious, lice generally do not cause significant harm, whereas pink eye can. He acknowledged Senator Bjorkman's advocacy for ensuring students remain in school to learn and

recognized the fiscal limitations that prevented inclusion of funding for additional school nurses. He asked about the potential impact of send-home policies, particularly for students who have difficulty accessing medical care, and the possible effects on learning loss. He asked how SB 151 balances those concerns.

SENATOR BJORKMAN replied that many individuals within schools care deeply about students and help connect families with resources to ensure students can return to school as soon as possible. He stated there are networks that assist students in obtaining lice treatment and that telehealth services may be used when appropriate. He added that expanded prescription authority for pharmacists could make it easier for students to obtain antibiotic treatment for pink eye without first seeing a physician. He stated there are multiple options available to help students receive timely treatment and reduce the spread of pink eye in schools.

[4:00:29 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN noted that programs such as Denali KidCare are available to assist families that have children under 18 years of age. She encouraged families needing assistance to seek information about the program.

CHAIR TOBIN asked why ringworm was not included in the legislation.

[4:00:43 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN replied ring worm is most commonly spread through middle and high school wrestling programs, which is a small subset of school age children.

[4:01:16 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN replied that as a wrestler she experienced being a member of that subset.

[4:01:25 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN thanked the committee for hearing the bill and for taking time at the end of session to consider the issue. He stated the bill addresses concerns that have generated significant public attention and frustration regarding school health practices.

[4:01:48 PM](#)

At ease.

[4:02:17 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN reconvened the meeting.

[4:02:24 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN solicited a motion.

[4:02:26 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to adopt the committee substitute (CS) for SB 151, work order 34-LS0709\0, as the working document.

[4:02:38 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN found no objection and CSSB 151 was adopted as the working document.

[4:02:56 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN found no discussion and solicited the will of the committee.

[4:02:57 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to report CSSB 151, work order 34-LS0709\0, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[4:03:09 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN found no objection and CSSB 151(EDC) was reported from the Senate Education Standing Committee.

[4:03:49 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 4:03 p.m.