

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

March 17, 2025

1:32 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: UNIVERSITY OF ANCHORAGE ALASKA (UAA) WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS IN ALASKA

- HEARD

SENATE BILL NO. 99

"An Act relating to private professional conservators; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 99

SHORT TITLE: CPA AS PRIVATE PROFESSIONAL CONSERVATORS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) MYERS

02/14/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/14/25	(S)	L&C, FIN
03/17/25	(S)	L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

DENISE RUNGE, Provost
University of Anchorage Alaska (UAA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented slides on UAA Workforce Solutions in Alaska.

RAY WEBER, Dean
Community and Technical College
University of Alaska Alaska (UAA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented slides on UAA Workforce Solutions in Alaska.

DEBBIE CRAIG, Dean
College of Health
University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented slides on UAA Workforce Solutions in Alaska.

CHERYL SIEMER, Director
Kenai Peninsula College
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented slides on UAA Workforce Solutions in Alaska.

SENATOR ROBERT MYERS, District Q
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 99.

ASHLYN BROOKS, Staff
Senator Robert Myers
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the sectional analysis for SB 99.

GORDON WILLIAMS, Attorney
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 99.

VIVIAN STIVER, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 99.

SYLVAN ROBB, Director
Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing
Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development
(DCCED)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding SB 99.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:32:13 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN called the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:32 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Merrick, Gray-Jackson, Dunbar, Yundt and Chair Bjorkman.

PRESENTATION: UNIVERSITY OF ANCHORAGE ALASKA (UAA) WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS IN ALASKA

[1:33:07 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced a presentation from the University of Alaska Anchorage: Workforce Solutions in Alaska.

[1:33:22 PM](#)

DENISE RUNGE, Provost, University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), Anchorage, Alaska, co-presented slides on UAA: Workforce Solutions in Alaska and moved to slide 2, Alaska's Largest Workforce Provider:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- UAA Creates Opportunity through Education
- Serving Alaska 70 years -- comprehensive open-access university
- Enroll +11,000 students
- Prepare students for careers through +180 programs from certificates to doctoral degrees

MS. RUNGE said UAA has 5 campuses located in Anchorage, Valdez, Homer, Soldotna and Kodiak.

[1:34:53 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE moved to slide 3, Dual Mission Serving Alaska, and stated that UAA is Alaska's only dual mission university, meaning it combines the open access and workforce focus of a community college with the advanced programs of a university. This allows UAA to quickly adapt to industry and community needs, offering everything from short-term certificates to full degrees. She said with over 35 industry advisory boards, UAA works closely with employers to ensure students are prepared for real jobs across Alaska.

[1:37:40 PM](#)

RAY WEBER, Dean, Community and Technical College, University of Anchorage Alaska (UAA), Anchorage, Alaska, co-presented slides on UAA: Workforce Solutions in Alaska and moved to slide 4, High Demand Industries- Aviation:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Alaska's largest flight school.
- Specialized programs for advancing pilot training and aviation management.
- Strong industry and K-12 partnerships.
- Pilot program full capacity - graduating dozens of pilots annually.

MR. WEBER said UAA has partnerships with Anchorage and Matsu School Districts.

[1:39:00 PM](#)

MR. WEBER moved to slide 5, High Demand Industries-Aviation, and stated that UAA's aviation programs are running at full capacity, but the demand keeps growing. He said the state needs about 230 aviation maintenance workers each year, yet UAA can only train and produce around 40 to 45. Despite this gap, UAA's aviation students have earned national recognition, and the university is working to expand opportunities possibly becoming one of the few enhanced training schools that prepare students to go straight into FAA jobs like air traffic control.

[1:40:04 PM](#)

MR. WEBER moved to slide 6, High Demand Industries-Construction, and stated that UAA's online construction management program is growing fast, helping people advance their careers with a focus on Arctic and cold-weather emphasis. Students take a national exam, and many go on to become licensed contractors, often working on major federally funded projects.

[1:40:49 PM](#)

MR. WEBER moved to slide 7, High Demand Industries-Automotive, and stated that UAA's diesel program is in high demand with students getting hired before they even finish. All students get hands-on experience through field work and internships. He said the program also partners with companies like Caterpillar and General Motors to train technicians and offer industry-recognized certifications.

[1:42:15 PM](#)

MR. WEBER moved to slide 8, High Demand Industries-Culinary and stated that UAA has the state's largest and longest-running culinary arts program, training students in both kitchen and restaurant operations for over 50 years. The program offers Occupational Endorsement Certificates in culinary and baking, with hands-on experience through internships and partnerships like Covenant House and local restaurants. It currently serves about 80 students and continues to support community training needs across Alaska.

[1:43:39 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE moved to slide 9, Alaska's Leader in AI Education, and stated that UAA is leading the way in artificial intelligence education, with new undergraduate and graduate programs approved to prepare students for AI-related careers. Courses are being developed at an increased rate across many fields like engineering, business, health, and education. She said everyone is looking to incorporate AI effectively in classrooms to help students learn how to use and manage AI in real-world settings. She said the university is also working to expand faculty and training to meet growing demand, knowing AI will be part of every industry's future.

[1:45:53 PM](#)

DEBBIE CRAIG, Dean, College of Health, University of Anchorage Alaska (UAA), Anchorage, Alaska, co-presented slides on the UAA: Workforce Solutions in Alaska and moved to slide 10, Alaska's Flagship Health University. She stated that UAA offers more than 50 healthcare related programs, from short-term certificates to clinical doctorates in fields like nursing, pharmacy, and occupational therapy. She said each year, nearly 2,000 students enroll, and 600-800 graduate ready to join Alaska's healthcare workforce. With strong partnerships across the state, including hospitals, the Department of Health, and an advisory council UAA ensures its programs meet real healthcare needs, offering nursing education at 15 locations from Bethel to Juneau.

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MS. CRAIG moved to slide 11, Growing Alaska's Health Workforce, and stated that with extra funding over the past few years, UAA has expanded several health and social service programs to meet Alaska's growing needs. This includes increasing the number of medical students in partnership with the University of Washington, nearly doubling the master's in social work cohort, and adding more spots in dental hygiene, radiology, and other health fields. She said UAA also launched Alaska's first PhD program in school counseling, aiming to help address the state's

youth mental health crisis, all supported by strong partnerships for clinical training across the state.

[1:50:11 PM](#)

MS. CRAIG moved to slide 12, Innovative Health Education Partnerships:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- WWAMI Medical Education with University of Washington
- MEDEX Physician Assistant with University of Washington
- Pharmacy Doctorate with Idaho State University
- Speech, Language Pathology with East Carolina University
- Occupational Therapy Doctorate with Creighton University

[1:51:44 PM](#)

CHERYL SIEMER, Director, Kenai Peninsula College, Soldotna, Alaska, co-presented slides on the University of Anchorage Alaska (UAA): Workforce Solutions in Alaska, and moved to slides 13 and 14. She stated that for over 25 years, UAA and Kenai Peninsula College's Process Technology program has been a leader in workforce training, recognized as one of the top programs in North America. The program has strong industry partnerships, and its graduates are actively recruited by major companies like ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, and ASRC, helping to meet growing workforce needs across Alaska and beyond.

[1:54:55 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE moved to slide 15, Expanding Opportunity:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Meet students where they are in life.
- Stackable Credentials to Build Achievement.
- Credit for prior learning / apprenticeships
- UAA designated Military Friendly School 16 years in a row.
- Providing education and services to armed forces, veterans and families at JBER.

MS. RUNGE talked about an Education Teacher Preparation Apprenticeship that just started.

[1:56:18 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE moved to slide 16, Pathways to Careers:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- College learning does not have to wait for college.
- Dual-enrollment earns both high school and college credit.
- ANSEP nationally recognized STEM program - pathway from elementary to advanced degrees since 1995.
- Middle College partnerships with local school districts serve thousands of students.

MS. RUNGE said every high school freshman in Anchorage now visits UAA to explore career options and engage directly with faculty through the Academies of Anchorage Pathways Program.

[1:57:55 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE moved to slide 17, Student Success, and shared a story of a UAA collegiate athlete graduate, Colin Hurd that has joined the Anchorage police force.

[1:58:40 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE moved to slide 18, UAA Results for Alaska:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- More than 71,000 UAA alumni worldwide.
- Represented in all major industries and communities.
- 29 members of 34th Alaska Legislature attended or worked at UAA.
- UAA alumni more likely to stay in Alaska.

[1:59:14 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE moved to slide 19, Workforce Solutions for Alaska, and stated that keep in mind the new term "dual mission" as UAA believes the new term "dual mission is the key to addressing Alaska's workforce needs. Students have open access to start wherever they are ready, take short-term programs, return multiple times, and continue learning and growing throughout their careers.

[1:59:55 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN explained that many high school students don't know what academic skills they need for college because there aren't clear checkpoints in the K-12 system to keep them on track. As a result, UAA has had to spend a lot on remedial courses to help students catch up. He asked how UAA helps students understand what will be expected of them, based on their goals.

[2:01:50 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE answered that UAA has reduced the number of developmental writing courses by finding better ways to support students without lowering standards: such as using writing samples instead of just test scores and offering extra academic support. These changes show that many students from Alaska's public schools are more prepared than previously thought. She said additionally, pathway programs in high schools are helping students connect their interests to future careers early on, which encourages them to take more rigorous courses and be better prepared for college, no matter what path they ultimately choose.

[2:04:47 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN asked if UAA requires all potential students to take an Accuplacer test.

[2:04:54 PM](#)

MS. RUNGE responded that UAA no longer has students take an Accuplacer test. UAA and the other two University of Alaska locations are experimenting with a new way of student placement called directed self-placement. She said students answer a series of questions about their life such as writing experiences and what classes they took in high school. This helps them figure out what classes they would be successful at in college.

[2:06:08 PM](#)

At ease.

SB 99-CPA AS PRIVATE PROFESSIONAL CONSERVATORS

[2:10:04 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 99 "An Act relating to private professional conservators; and providing for an effective date."

[2:10:32 PM](#)

SENATOR ROBERT MYERS, District Q, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 99 presented a summary of the following legislation:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The issue we are seeking to address with SB 99 was originally brought to our attention by a constituent. After looking into the statutes, we realized that there could be an alternative to the current conservator licensing process that would allow more people to become private professional conservators while keeping the high standards that protect the individuals under their care.

Currently, an individual seeking a private professional conservator license must obtain a certificate in guardianship from a national organization before applying for their conservator license from the State of Alaska. The guardianship certification is applicable to people who wish to become full guardians, but it is much less applicable to someone who will only be handling finances and will not have responsibility for the physical wellbeing of the individuals under their care. This certification is costly and time intensive, especially for professionals who already maintain certification for a related professional license. Certified Public Accountants must obtain their bachelor's degree in accounting and complete continuing education credits every two years. Since CP As are already qualified professionals with an emphasis on fiduciary responsibilities, they are strong candidates for being private professional conservators.

SB 99 seeks to create an alternative to the guardianship certification requirement currently in statute for individuals who are licensed as CP As in Alaska. Licensed CP As would still have to meet all other requirements under the current statutes. This would just remove the external certification requirement for CP As which could be a barrier to individuals becoming licensed private professional conservators.

As Alaska's population is aging, we will continue to have increased need for professionals who can provide

financial support to this group. Unfortunately, we are already facing a shortage of providers who can offer care for the needs of an aging population. While this bill will not be enough to solve all of these issues, we hope it will be a small step towards addressing the needs of our state.

[2:13:02 PM](#)

ASHLYN BROOKS, Staff, Senator Robert Myers, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 99:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 99 ver. A - Sectional Analysis

Section 1: Page 1, Lines 4-14; Page 2, Lines 1-11

Adds previous licensing as a CPA under AS 08.04 as an alternative to certification by a national guardianship group in order to become a licensed conservator.

Section 2: Page 2, Lines 12-21.

Conforming language regarding the issuance of temporary licenses for private professional guardians.

Section 3: Page 2, Lines 22-28.

Establishes that a temporary license holder may submit proof of required guardianship certificate or CPA license to obtain a permanent license.

Section 4: Page 2, Lines 29-31; and Page 3, Lines 1-5.

Adds a new section establishing that the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development shall issue a temporary license to an individual seeking a private professional conservator license who likely will become certified or licensed within one year from the date the temporary license is issued if they meet all other requirements of a private professional conservator license.

Section 5: Page 3, Lines 6-31; and Page 4, Lines 1-7.

Conforming language stating that failure to maintain either a CPA license or a national guardianship certification is grounds for disciplinary action.

Section 6: Page 4, Line 8

Establishes an immediate effective date for the bill.

[2:15:43 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced invited testimony on SB 99.

[2:15:54 PM](#)

GORDON WILLIAMS, Attorney, Ketchikan, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 99 and stated that guardianship and conservatorship proceedings are serious legal matters because they involve taking away a person's rights to manage their own money or make personal decisions often due to illness, dementia, or injury, not because of any wrongdoing. That's why it's so important to have qualified, trustworthy people involved in these cases. He said adding licensed CPAs to the list of those eligible to serve in these roles makes sense, as they are already trained, regulated professionals with the skills needed to manage finances and prepare accurate reports.

[2:19:44 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN asked if a CPA wants to become a conservator now what do they have to do and how would that change under this current legislation.

[2:19:59 PM](#)

MR. WILLIAMS responded that a CPA can already serve as a conservator without a license, but to be a licensed professional conservator, they currently must get certified by the National Guardianship Association. SB 99 removes that extra step, recognizing that CPAs already have the skills and training needed.

[2:21:34 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR clarified that in Mr. Williams testimony he mentioned he was part of a group that put forward different kinds of legislation proposals. He asked if that was under the guidance of the bar association and what does the group do.

[2:22:00 PM](#)

MR. WILLIAMS answered that the Association of Trust and Estate Professionals is not linked with the bar association. He said the group is a state planning professional association.

[2:22:51 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked that Mr. Williams describe the legal difference between a conservatorship and a guardianship.

[2:23:19 PM](#)

MR. WILLIAMS responded that a guardian is someone who makes health, welfare and safety decisions for a person who can't make them on their own and a conservator makes decisions concerning a persons money and assets. He said in Alaska there is a third option called a full guardianship, who makes the guardian decisions as well as the conservator decisions.

[2:25:09 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked if SB 99 only impacts conservatorships and is there a separate licensing process for guardians.

[2:25:34 PM](#)

MR. WILLIAMS answered that he does not know.

[2:26:21 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS explained that guardians and conservators have separate licenses. A guardian license covers all aspects of care, while a conservator license only applies to financial matters. In Alaska, the two licensing programs are similar, but SB 99 aims to further distinguish between them.

[2:27:40 PM](#)

MR. WILLIAMS referenced AS 08.26.010 that discusses licensing for guardians and conservators.

[2:28:32 PM](#)

VIVIAN STIVER, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 99:

[Original punctuation provided.]

I am writing my letter of support today as a private citizen in my capacity as a senior housing professional and not in my capacity as a member of the Alaska Commission on Aging board of directors.

I have worked in senior housing for the last 15 years and have witnessed just how important it is for our seniors to remain as independent as possible as they age. Seniors thrive socially, physically and emotionally when the appropriate amount of assistance is available for them. Losing independence too soon can cause them to retreat socially and feel discouraged because of the loss of control in areas of their lives which they could continue to address independently.

[2:29:19 PM](#)

MS. STIVER continued with her testimony of SB 99:

Over the years I worked with a couple of seniors that experienced tremors and could no longer write checks. They would hand me the check book asking me to fill it in for them. This always makes me uncomfortable because they are vulnerable to "bad actors" who could alter the check, get account numbers and other information. Having a conservator would close this loop and protect the senior financially. Also, since seniors don't use computers, a conservator has a better chance of identifying withdrawals from a senior's account promptly because of fraud such as "phishing."

A conservator has limited powers compared to a guardian because the conservator only manages financial affairs for the senior such as collecting and depositing all income, pays all debts and bills, secures all assets, and handles taxes and insurance. Making it more reasonable for accountants to fill this role by adjusting the licensing requirements, will assist our seniors in remaining independent longer, keeping their dignity intact while protecting them from "bad actors."

MS. STIVER stated having a licensed financial guardian can ease the burden on families, providing reassurance and reducing stress. Typically, a child that lives close to the individual typically is the guardian and caregiver. Separating financial management from direct care helps balance responsibilities and alleviates pressure on the primary caregiver.

[2:32:10 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN asked what someone would need to do to become a conservator.

[2:32:34 PM](#)

MS. BROOKS answered that conservators must get certified through a national guardianship organization by taking mostly accounting and technical training courses. These courses may be taken online. She said every other year the conservator would need to be recertified by taking continuing education classes through the same institution.

[2:33:35 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN asked whether there is training for conservators that have clients who can't advocate for themselves, like dementia.

[2:33:56 PM](#)

MS. BROOKS replied that to receive a certificate from the National Guardianship Association, a person must learn one of the core competencies called surrogate decision making and it may be helpful in a situation with a dementia client.

[2:34:40 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN asked what the barriers are for CPAs to be conservators.

[2:34:52 PM](#)

MS. BROOKS responded that the main barriers are finances and time. She said it cost \$1800 dollars to get certified and licensed in Alaska.

[2:35:43 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS added that SB 99 aims to remove unnecessary barriers for those who only want to handle the financial side of care. Current certification includes training that mostly applies to guardianship. The goal is to make it easier for those already trained in financial responsibility to serve in this role.

[2:37:44 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR referenced Section 5 [AS.08.26.130] stating that the department may take disciplinary action against an individual. He assumed that there isn't a board handling the licensing and discipline. He asked what department oversees disciplinary actions and if applicants won't be paying the national certification fee will they still pay the state licensing fee.

[2:38:31 PM](#)

SYLVAN ROBB, Director, Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing, Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED), Anchorage, Alaska, and answered that there isn't a board for this program and the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED) would take over disciplinary and license action. She said the Guardian and Conservator Program is a small program with as few as 20 licensees and won't require much money to run.

[2:39:11 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked whether DCCED anticipated an increase in [disciplinary] actions, or any risk of inappropriate action, if legislators allowed licensure without requiring certification from NGA, using only a CPA license.

[2:39:45 PM](#)

MS. ROBB replied that becoming a CPA requires more education, including a bachelor's degree, while a conservator license only requires experience handling finance or at least an associate degree in a related field. She reiterated this is a small program, and important safeguards like background checks and checks with adult protective services will remain in place to ensure conservators meet the same high standards already required.

[2:40:39 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked whether it is DCCED's assertion that SB 99 would not pose an increased financial risk to people under the care of conservators.

[2:41:03 PM](#)

MS. ROBB answered that the division is neutral on SB 99. It is a policy call for the legislature.

[2:41:27 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS commented that his goal with SB 99 is to make it easier for somebody to obtain and hold on to a conservatorship license.

[2:43:11 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN held SB 99 in committee.

[2:43:26 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Bjorkman adjourned the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting at 2:43 p.m.