

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE

May 9, 2025

1:31 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

SENATE BILL NO. 147

"An Act relating to the prescription and administration of drugs and devices by pharmacists; relating to reciprocity for pharmacists; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSSB 147(L&C) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 117

"An Act renaming the State Commission for Human Rights the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights; relating to removal of commissioners of the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights; relating to reports from the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights; relating to the definition of 'employer' for the purposes of the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights; and relating to local civil rights commissions."

- MOVED SB 117 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 158

"An Act relating to administrative areas for regulation of certain commercial set net entry permits; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED SB 158 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 116

"An Act exempting from insurance regulation cooperative agreements entered into by two or more persons engaged in commercial fishing for the purpose of paying claims or losses."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 159

"An Act increasing contributions to the Department of Labor and Workforce Development for the State Training and Employment Program."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 172

"An Act relating to occupational therapist licensure; relating to occupational therapy assistant licensure; and relating to an occupational therapist licensure compact."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 147

SHORT TITLE: PHARMACIST PRESCRIPTION AUTHORITY

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) GIESSEL BY REQUEST

03/26/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/26/25	(S)	HSS, L&C
04/15/25	(S)	HSS AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/15/25	(S)	Heard & Held
04/15/25	(S)	MINUTE(HSS)
04/22/25	(S)	HSS AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/22/25	(S)	Heard & Held
04/22/25	(S)	MINUTE(HSS)
04/29/25	(S)	HSS AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/29/25	(S)	Moved SB 147 Out of Committee
04/29/25	(S)	MINUTE(HSS)
04/30/25	(S)	HSS RPT 4DP
04/30/25	(S)	DP: DUNBAR, CLAMAN, GIESSEL, TOBIN
05/05/25	(S)	L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
05/05/25	(S)	Heard & Held
05/05/25	(S)	MINUTE(L&C)
05/09/25	(S)	L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 117

SHORT TITLE: STATE COMMISSION FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

SPONSOR(s): STATE AFFAIRS

03/05/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/05/25 (S) L&C, FIN
05/05/25 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
05/05/25 (S) Heard & Held
05/05/25 (S) MINUTE(L&C)
05/09/25 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 158

SHORT TITLE: COOK INLET: NEW ADMIN AREA

SPONSOR(s): BJORKMAN

04/07/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/07/25 (S) L&C, RES
05/07/25 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
05/07/25 (S) Heard & Held
05/07/25 (S) MINUTE(L&C)
05/09/25 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: HB 116

SHORT TITLE: COMMERCIAL FISHING INSURANCE CO-OP

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

02/26/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/26/25 (H) FSH, L&C
03/01/25 (H) FSH AT 11:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/01/25 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --
03/04/25 (H) FSH AT 10:30 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/04/25 (H) Heard & Held
03/04/25 (H) MINUTE(FSH)
03/06/25 (H) FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/06/25 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --
03/11/25 (H) FSH RPT 6DP 1NR
03/11/25 (H) DP: VANCE, KOPP, EDGMON, HIMSCHOOT,
ELAM, STUTES
03/11/25 (H) NR: MCCABE
03/11/25 (H) FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/11/25 (H) Moved HB 116 Out of Committee
03/11/25 (H) MINUTE(FSH)
03/13/25 (H) FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/13/25 (H) <Bill Hearing Canceled>
03/21/25 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
03/21/25 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --
03/24/25 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
03/24/25 (H) Moved HB 116 Out of Committee
03/24/25 (H) MINUTE(L&C)

03/26/25 (H) L&C RPT 5DP 1NR
 03/26/25 (H) DP: CARRICK, COULOMBE, BURKE, FIELDS,
 HALL
 03/26/25 (H) NR: NELSON
 04/25/25 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
 04/25/25 (H) VERSION: HB 116
 04/28/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 04/28/25 (S) L&C
 05/09/25 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 159

SHORT TITLE: TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT PROG: CONTRIBUTIONS
 SPONSOR(s): LABOR & COMMERCE

04/07/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 04/07/25 (S) L&C, FIN
 05/05/25 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
 05/05/25 (S) Heard & Held
 05/05/25 (S) MINUTE(L&C)
 05/09/25 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 172

SHORT TITLE: OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY LICENSURE COMPACT
 SPONSOR(s): LABOR & COMMERCE

04/14/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 04/14/25 (S) L&C, FIN
 05/09/25 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

SENATOR CATHY GIESSEL, District E
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 147.

KONRAD JACKSON, Staff
 Senator Jesse Bjorkman
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the summary of changes from version I to version G of SB 147.

DANIEL NELSON, Director
 Pharmacy
 Tanana Chief Conference (TCC)
 Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 147.

LINDA GUTIERREZ-MILLER, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 147.

NICOLE THOMAS, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 147.

BOB BIRD, representing self
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 147.

AMITY WINBORG, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 147.

BARRY CHRISTENSEN, Owner
Island Pharmacy
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 147.

STEVEN PEARCE, Director
Citizens Commission on Human Rights
Seattle, Washington

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 147.

AIMEE YOUNG, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 147.

DAN HARTMAN, Service Line Medical Director
Southcentral Foundation
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 147.

BRITTANY KARNS, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 147.

PAMELA SAMASH, representing self
Nenana, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 147.

PAUL ZANTO, Pharmacy Manager
Fred Meyer

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 147.

PAT MARTIN, Executive Director

Alaska Right to Life

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 147.

BALLARD SAUL, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 147.

DOROTHY DEBLAUW, representing self

Healy, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 147.

BRANDY SEIGNEMARTIN, Executive Director

Alaska Pharmacist Association

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions for SB 147.

SENATOR SCOTT KAWASAKI, District P

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 117.

REBECCA CARRILLO, Member

Alaska State Commission for Human Rights (ASCHR)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 117.

WILLIAM CRAIG, Commissioner

Alaska Human Rights Commission (AHRC)

Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 117.

KONRAD JACKSON, Staff

Senator Jesse Bjorkman

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the summary for SB 158.

GREG JOHNSON, representing self

Vancouver, Canada

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 158.

GARY HOLLIER, representing self

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 158.

GARY DEIMAN, representing self

Ninilchik, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 158.

TED CROOKSTON, representing self

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 158.

ALLAN CROOKSTON, Owner

Tide Chaser Fisheries

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 158.

DANIEL NORMAN, representing self

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 158.

JOANN WICHERS, representing self

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 158.

LISA GABRIEL, representing self

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 158.

ANDY HALL, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 158.

TRAVIS EVERY, representing self

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 158.

REPRESENTATIVE LOUISE STUTES, District 5

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 116.

TRACY WELCH, Executive Director

United Fisherman of Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on HB 116.

LORI WING-HEIER, Director

Division of Insurance

Department of Commerce, Community and
Economic Development (DCCED)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on HB 116.

BOB KEHOE, Executive Director
Purse Seine Vessel Owners Association
Seattle, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 116.

LAURA ACHEE, Staff
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a brief recap of SB 159.

MATT CHURCHILL, Staff
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the summary for SB 172.

KEITH BUCKHOUT, Policy Analyst
Council of State Government
Lexington, Kentucky

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 172.

BRIANNA OSWALD, President
Alaska Occupational Therapy Association
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 172.

KATHLEEN HANSEN, Assistant Director
Rehabilitation
Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 172.

REBECCA DEAN, Public Member
Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy (PTOT) Board
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 172.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:31:53 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN called the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Merrick, Gray-Jackson, Dunbar, Yundt and Chair Bjorkman.

SB 147-PHARMACIST PRESCRIPTION AUTHORITY

[1:32:44 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 147 "An Act relating to the prescription and administration of drugs and devices by pharmacists; relating to reciprocity for pharmacists; and providing for an effective date."

[1:32:58 PM](#)

SENATOR CATHY GIESSEL, District E, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, as sponsor of SB 147, stated that the bill expands healthcare access by allowing qualified pharmacists to test and treat common illnesses such as the flu, colds, UTIs, and strep throat, and to perform pregnancy tests. The authority has already been granted in 30 other states.

[1:33:59 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN solicited a motion.

[1:34:01 PM](#)

SENATOR MERRICK moved to adopt the committee substitute (CS) for SB 147 work order 34-LS0274\G, as the working document.

[1:34:12 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN objected for purposes of discussion.

[1:34:22 PM](#)

KONRAD JACKSON, Staff, Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided changes for version I to version G of SB 147. He stated that the committee substitute adds language in Section 6, page 5, paragraphs 11 and 12, clarifying that "patient care services" do not include prescribing an abortion-inducing drug.

[1:35:04 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR stated that while the language added to SB 147 may raise constitutional concerns similar to those previously identified, the bill maintains the status quo. He said pharmacists still cannot prescribe abortion inducing drugs. Despite reservations, he supports SB 147 and will not object.

[1:36:33 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN stated that the changes in the proposed CS of expanding prescriptive authority for pharmacists does not permit them to prescribe abortion-inducing drugs.

[1:36:49 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON stated that amending the prescriptive authority of pharmacists does not prevent patients from obtaining abortion-inducing prescriptions through their doctors.

[1:37:21 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN removed his objection.

[1:37:25 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN found no further objection and CSSB 147 was adopted as the working document.

[1:37:34 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN opened public testimony on SB 147.

[1:38:08 PM](#)

DANIEL NELSON, Director, Pharmacy, Tanana Chief Conference (TCC), Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 147. TCC endorses expanding pharmacist-provided care to address Alaska's healthcare workforce shortage. He said SB 147 will allow more than 500 highly trained pharmacists to use their full expertise to improve access, community health, and safety statewide.

[1:39:38 PM](#)

LINDA GUTIERREZ-MILLER, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 147. She explained that the bill would enhance collaborative practice agreements, allowing pharmacists to prescribe controlled substances and improve access to care. Pharmacists spend more time with patients, support physicians in managing chronic conditions, and improve health outcomes, making SB 147 beneficial for both providers and patients in Alaska.

[1:41:37 PM](#)

NICOLE THOMAS, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 147. She argued that allowing pharmacists to prescribe medications could endanger patient safety due to limited time for thorough assessments and lack of continuity of care. She emphasized that healthcare relies on a layered system, doctors, pharmacists, and nurses each verifying one another's work and warned that bypassing this process is risky.

[1:44:05 PM](#)

BOB BIRD, representing self, Kenai, Alaska, testified in support of SB 147. He said earlier comments were hard to hear and asked for confirmation that SB 147 was changed to prevent pharmacists from prescribing abortion pills.

[1:44:46 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN replied that his understanding was correct, the change occurred just before the hearing.

MR BIRD asked who introduced the amendment to change pharmacists prescriptive authority of abortion pills.

CHAIR BJORKMAN answered it was introduced by the Chairman of the committee.

MR. BIRD stated that he needed more clarification before he could testify.

CHAIR BJORKMAN answered that the changes made to SB 147 clarified pharmacist would not be able to prescribe abortion inducing drugs.

MR. BIRD sought confirmation that pharmacists cannot independently provide abortion-inducing drugs upon request.

CHAIR BJORKMAN replied yes.

MR. BIRD responded that he is thankful for the change.

[1:46:26 PM](#)

AMITY WINBORG, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 147. She stated that the bill would allow pharmacists to play a greater role in managing chronic diseases and supporting patient care. Pharmacists already collaborate closely with physicians and other providers to adjust medications, prevent side effects, and consider prescription affordability. She said expanding their authority would improve access to care, particularly in underserved areas, and help patients receive more comprehensive and timely treatment.

[1:48:13 PM](#)

BARRY CHRISTENSEN, Owner, Island Pharmacy, Ketchikan, Alaska, testified in support of SB 147. He emphasized that pharmacy practice in Alaska has evolved significantly over 40 years and that SB 147 represents a positive step forward for the future of healthcare in the state.

[1:50:04 PM](#)

STEVEN PEARCE, Director, Citizens Commission on Human Rights, Seattle, Washington, testified in opposition to SB 147. He argued that allowing pharmacists to prescribe psychiatric medications could increase reliance on these drugs without addressing underlying issues. He noted the lack of objective tests in psychiatry and suggested SB 147 be amended to restrict pharmacist prescribing.

[1:51:34 PM](#)

AIMEE YOUNG, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 147. She described creating a walk-in pharmacy immunization clinic in 2006 to expand vaccine access and improve rates. She specialized in pain management, collaborating with healthcare teams to provide non-opioid care and reduce opioid use. She emphasized that pharmacists are highly accessible medication experts, and SB 147 enables them to work at the top of their training and scope of practice.

[1:53:22 PM](#)

DAN HARTMAN, Service Line Medical Director, Southcentral Foundation, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 147. He said the bill allows pharmacists to practice at the full scope of their training, leveraging their doctoral education and clinical experience. SB 147 increases access to care, enables pharmacists to provide patient-care services under collaborative agreements, supports workforce expansion, and includes safeguards for prescribing opioids.

[1:55:45 PM](#)

BRITTANY KARNS, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 147. She emphasized that, like other healthcare professionals, pharmacists have a defined scope of practice and seek only to work within it. She said pharmacists are cautious, trusted providers who carefully monitor prescriptions and aim to reduce unnecessary medication. SB 147 would allow pharmacists help address Alaska's healthcare access challenges in appropriate clinical settings without compromising safety or care quality.

[1:58:11 PM](#)

PAMELA SAMASH, representing self, Nenana, Alaska, testified in support of SB 147. She clarified she no longer wished to speak on behalf of Right to Life and thanked legislators for amending the portion of SB 147 that would not have protected women in villages from abortion drugs and related health risks. She urged

consideration of safeguards regarding psychiatric drug prescriptions.

[1:59:35 PM](#)

PAUL ZANTO, Pharmacy Manager, Fred Meyer, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in support of SB 147. He highlighted that the bill would expand pharmacists' authority to provide care, including prescribing medications within their training, improving access for all Alaskans. He emphasized pharmacists' extensive education, community relationships, and the alignment of the bill with nationwide standards, and expressed strong support for its passage.

[2:01:59 PM](#)

PAT MARTIN, Executive Director, Alaska Right to Life, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 147. He argued that even with amendments limiting pharmacists' ability to prescribe abortion-inducing drugs SB 147 still allows pharmacists to dispense them with a prescription, expanding abortion access through pharmacies and rural clinics.

[2:04:19 PM](#)

BALLARD SAUL, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 147. She highlighted that her extensive education and training allows her to optimize medication use, improve patient outcomes, and reduce hospitalizations. Passing SB 147 would enable pharmacists to practice fully within their expertise, enhancing care for all Alaskans.

[2:07:07 PM](#)

DOROTHY DEBLAUW, representing self, Healy, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 147. She argued that the bill gives pharmacists too much power, particularly regarding abortion, and called for safeguards to protect pharmacists' conscience and ethical choices.

[2:08:44 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN closed public testimony on SB 147.

[2:08:59 PM](#)

SENATOR YUNDT asked for clarification on whether pharmacists would be allowed to prescribe psychiatric drugs in pharmacies.

[2:09:28 PM](#)

BRANDY SEIGNEMARTIN, Executive Director, Alaska Pharmacist Association, Anchorage, Alaska, answered questions on SB 147. She clarified that existing laws already limited pharmacists'

care services to general health, wellness, and minor conditions guided by clear diagnostic tests. She said only specially trained pharmacists, such as board-certified psychiatric pharmacists working collaboratively with other providers, could engage in psychiatric care, not those in general pharmacy settings.

[2:10:46 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN asked how pharmacists' ability to handle abortion inducing medication was amended in the CS for SB 147.

[2:11:00 PM](#)

MS. SEIGNNEMARTIN replied that SB 147 does not address or expand pharmacists' drug dispensing functions. SB 147 focuses solely on patient care services outside dispensing.

[2:11:54 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN solicited the will of the committee.

[2:11:58 PM](#)

SENATOR MERRICK moved to report CSSB 147, work order 34-LS0274\G, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[2:12:16 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN found no objection and CSSB 147(L&C) was reported from the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee.

[2:12:31 PM](#)

At ease.

SB 117-STATE COMMISSION FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

[2:14:36 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 117 "An Act renaming the State Commission for Human Rights the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights; relating to removal of commissioners of the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights; relating to reports from the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights; relating to the definition of 'employer' for the purposes of the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights; and relating to local civil rights commissions."

[2:15:11 PM](#)

SENATOR SCOTT KAWASAKI, District P, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, as sponsor of SB 117 he stated that the bill

does more than rename the Human Rights Commission to the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights to align with other civil rights organizations. It also includes several substantive updates to the commission's operations and authority. First, it clarifies that the commission may support workers, hold hearings, and investigate complaints involving nonprofit organizations. Second, it allows a religious organization to permit a defense in discrimination cases when employment actions are tied to religious beliefs or practices. Third, it updates the commission's annual reporting requirement to allow submission in electronic form and extends the deadline to November 15, giving staff more time to compile accurate records after the legislative session. Finally, the bill modifies the rules for removing commissioners appointed by the governor, permitting removal only for cause—such as incompetence, neglect of duty, misconduct, or statements that undermine the commission's work—rather than at will. Overall, the changes are technical in nature and were requested by the commission to improve its clarity, consistency, and governance.

[2:17:08 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN opened public testimony on SB 117.

[2:17:37 PM](#)

REBECCA CARRILLO, member, Alaska State Commission for Human Rights (ASCHR), Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of SB 117. She explained that the bill updates the commission's reporting deadline because the current schedule is impractical. ASCHR cannot access its data until January 1, and preparing the report takes several weeks, so moving the deadline to November 15 aligns with the fiscal year and allows sufficient time for review. She also noted that changing the name from the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights to the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights modernizes the language and clarifies its focus on state-level civil rights issues, reducing confusion with broader human rights matters.

[2:22:14 PM](#)

WILLIAM CRAIG, Commissioner, Alaska Human Rights Commission (AHRC), Sitka, Alaska, testified in support of SB 117 and asked the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee to pass the bill without any amendments. He said the name change aligns with what the state legislature has mandated for AHRC.

[2:22:48 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN closed public testimony on SB 117.

[2:23:09 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN solicited the will of the committee.

[2:23:12 PM](#)

SENATOR MERRICK moved to report SB 117, work order 34-LS0698\A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[2:23:30 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN found no objection and SB 117 was reported from the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee.

[2:23:43 PM](#)

At ease.

SB 158-COOK INLET: NEW ADMIN AREA

[2:25:28 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 158 "An Act relating to administrative areas for regulation of certain commercial set net entry permits; and providing for an effective date."

[2:25:44 PM](#)

KONRAD JACKSON, Staff, Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided a summary, on behalf of the sponsor for SB 158. He said the bill directs the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) to establish a new boundary in the upper subdistrict of Cook Inlet's Central District, incorporating six statistical areas traditionally fished by East Side set netters. He stated that this change reflects the fishery's unique history and management practices and would benefit local fishermen and their families.

[2:26:36 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN opened public testimony on SB 158.

[2:27:03 PM](#)

GREG JOHNSON, representing self, Vancouver, Canada, testified in support of SB 158 and stated that the bill is a crucial first step toward addressing the challenges facing this long troubled and currently unviable fishery.

[2:27:51 PM](#)

GARY HOLLIER, representing self, Kenai, Alaska, testified in support of SB 158 and stated that he supports Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) Commissioner Glenn Haight's

comment that passing SB 158 would make it simple and straightforward for CFEC to carry out its intent.

[2:28:42 PM](#)

GARY DEIMAN, representing self, Ninilchik, Alaska, testified in support of SB 158 and asked for the legislators to be fair to the East Side net setters.

[2:30:03 PM](#)

TED CROOKSTON, representing self, Kenai, Alaska, testified in support of SB 158. Testimony was not audible.

[2:30:54 PM](#)

ALLAN CROOKSTON, Owner, Tide Chaser Fisheries, Kenai, Alaska, testified in support of SB 158 and stated that the past several years have been disastrous with little hope for the future. He emphasized that the East Side from Ninilchik to Nikiski is unique and should be managed separately to address its specific challenges and needs.

[2:32:16 PM](#)

DANIEL NORMAN, representing self, Kenai, Alaska, testified in support of SB 158. He said fishing unites people, yet East Side set netters have faced federal disasters in six of the last seven years and bear most of the burden of Chinook conservation. East Side set netters fleet is shrinking, the voices are limited, and they've long been managed differently. He stated that SB 158 would finally recognize those differences and allow fair, tailored management for their fishery.

[2:33:32 PM](#)

JOANN WICHERS, representing self, Kenai, Alaska, testified in support of SB 158.

[2:34:07 PM](#)

LISA GABRIEL, representing self, Kenai, Alaska, testified in support of SB 158.

[2:34:43 PM](#)

ANDY HALL, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 158. He said his family owns four permits and that the East Side Set Net fishery has faced federal disaster declarations in six of the last seven years, with no end in sight. He emphasized that while their fishery is limited, sport and personal-use fisheries face no such restrictions and set netters need tools to build a sustainable future instead of remaining idle each season.

[2:35:45 PM](#)

TRAVIS EVERY, representing self, Kenai, Alaska, testified in support of SB 158. He said creating a new administrative area would give fishermen more control over the future of their permits, fishery, and family businesses. He added that remaining idle year after year is not a good outcome for the fishery, the Kenai Peninsula community, or the state.

[2:36:53 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN closed public testimony on SB 158.

[2:37:06 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN solicited the will of the committee.

[2:37:08 PM](#)

SENATOR MERRICK moved to report SB 158, work order 34-LS0519\I, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[2:37:24 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN found no objection and SB 158 was reported from the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee.

[2:37:38 PM](#)

At ease.

HB 116-COMMERCIAL FISHING INSURANCE CO-OP

[2:39:16 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of HOUSE BILL NO. 116 "An Act exempting from insurance regulation cooperative agreements entered into by two or more persons engaged in commercial fishing for the purpose of paying claims or losses."

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REPRESENTATIVE LOUISE STUTES, District 5, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, as sponsor of HB 116 she read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Before you is HB 116, sponsored by the House Special Committee on Fisheries by request of the Joint Legislative Task Force on Evaluating Alaska's Seafood Industry.

- As a member of the that task force, along with you Mr. Chairman, it is my honor to bring this bill forward on behalf of the fishing industry.

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES continued with the summary of HB 116:

Pursuant recommendation 10 (a) of task force, House Bill 116 would allow for member-owned commercial fishing insurance cooperatives based in Alaska to form without being considered an insurer.

- Specifically, the bill would allow commercial fishermen to enter into a cooperative insurance agreement to pay claims arising from liability or damage to a vessel without being regulated under Title 21, the State's insurance code.
- There are already three such insurance pools operating in Alaska, but they're umbrellaed under an organization based in Washington State, which has a commercial fishing carve out in its insurance code. Those pools, managed by the Purse Seine Vessel Owners' Association, include the Seine Vessel's Reserve, which provides insurance to seiners in Alaska, the Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Alliance Reserve which insures gillnetters and trollers in Southeast and Central Alaska, and finally the Bristol Bay Reserve which insures gillnetters in their area. Combined, the three pools insure around 840 vessels.
- Rising premiums and availability of insurance serve as a barrier to operating for Alaska's aging commercial fishing fleet.
- Underwriters have been raising premiums on individual vessels and have become increasingly selective of which vessels they insure.
- Insurance pooling can provide a more attractive, lower risk alternative for underwriters than insuring individual vessels, as well as lower costs for our fishermen.

- Some of the benefits of a commercial fishermen owned pool could be:

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REPRESENTATIVE STUTES continued with the summary of HB 116:

-Lower premiums

-The ability to structure itself to meet the needs of the Alaska Fishing Industry. For example, the pool could have underwriting guidelines that allow for the insurance for wooden vessels, older vessels, and/or vessels that have been unable to purchase insurance in the commercial market.

-These pools would have a board of directors comprised of fishermen that are members of the pool who make the decisions for which applications are accepted into the pool, providing smart local control, as well as an additional layer of knowledge about vessels who apply.

-Pools can also offer dividends for good loss experience or credits against future premiums in years where the pool performs well against vessel claims and losses.

- With operating costs at an all-time high and fishing markets at an all-time low, House Bill 116 seeks to provide lower cost and easier to access insurance alternatives for Alaska's commercial fishing fleet
- This bill comes at no cost to the state and supports our fishing industry by simply allowing Alaska based commercial fishing insurance cooperatives to form.
- Again, this is a direct recommendation of the joint Legislative Task Force Evaluating Alaska's seafood industry.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN announced invited testimony on HB 116.

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TRACY WELCH, Executive Director, United Fisherman of Alaska, testified by invitation on HB 116. She said rising insurance costs have become one of the industry's biggest challenges, making coverage unaffordable for some vessel owners. She added that allowing cooperative insurance pools to operate in Alaska, as HB 116 proposes, would lower costs and reduce risk for small fishing businesses.

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SENATOR YUNDT commented that HB 116 is great legislation.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN asked if HB 116 simply allows a group of fishermen to pool funds to cover losses and whether HB 116 is any more complex than that.

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LORI WING-HEIER, Director, Division of Insurance, Anchorage, Alaska, answered questions on HB 116. She confirmed that HB 116 mirrors Washington's insurance code, allowing fishermen to form cooperative insurance pools that they manage and control collectively, including decisions on underwriting, rates, and reinsurance.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN asked whether an insurance pool could refuse to cover a member's losses if that member caused problems for others, and whether the individual would have any recourse to the state for payment.

[2:48:34 PM](#)

MS. WING-HEIER explained that the pool could not refuse to pay a member's losses, but the insurance pool could decide not to insure that person.

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SENATOR YUNDT asked how many other industries in Alaska have implemented a similar approach.

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MS. WING-HEIER replied that several nontraditional insurance models exist in Alaska, such as the Alaska Municipal League's Joint Insurance Association, small insurers like URICA Energy Management, and captives purchased out of state. However, Alaska has not yet authorized or established captive insurance within the state.

[2:50:02 PM](#)

BOB KEHOE, Executive Director, Purse Seine Vessel Owners Association, Seattle, Washington testified in support of HB 116. He said the bill is a good alternative, noting that his organization already manages three insurance pools for Alaska vessels. He encouraged other fishing groups to collaborate, consult marine insurance brokers, and consider forming similar pools.

[CHAIR BJORKMAN concluded invited testimony on HB 116.]

[CHAIR BJORKMAN held HB 116 in committee.]

SB 159-TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT PROG: CONTRIBUTIONS

[2:52:17 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 159 "An Act increasing contributions to the Department of Labor and Workforce Development for the State Training and Employment Program."

[2:52:41 PM](#)

LAURA ACHEE, Staff, Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, paraphrased the following brief recap of SB 159:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The bill would redirect a portion of the taxes that Alaska workers already pay into the state's unemployment trust fund to funding for technical and vocational education. Alaska workers would not see any change in the taxes they pay, and the unemployment insurance trust fund is more than healthy enough to withstand lowering the inflow of revenue.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN opened public testimony on SB 159; finding none, he closed public testimony.

[2:54:01 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN held SB 159 in committee.

SB 172-OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY LICENSURE COMPACT

[2:54:10 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 172 "An Act relating to occupational therapist licensure; relating to occupational therapy assistant licensure; and relating to an occupational therapist licensure compact."

[2:54:35 PM](#)

MATT CHURCHILL, Staff, Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, introduced SB 172 on behalf of the sponsor and read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Occupational therapy plays a vital role in helping people learn or reestablish the ability to independently do many of the everyday tasks that most of us take for granted, from *chewing and swallowing food*, to *balancing and walking*, to *simply dressing and undressing themselves*.

There is only one training program in the entire state, and we simply do not have enough occupational therapists for the many Alaskans who are in need of this life-changing service (particularly in rural parts of the state) with over 200 listed job positions for physical therapists currently unfilled across Alaska.

Senate Bill 172 enacts the Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact, an interstate compact that increases patient access to occupational therapy by making it easier for licensed physical therapists to move and work between member states without repeatedly dealing with bureaucratic red tape. Enacting the Compact will at the same time enhance the state's ability to protect the public's health and safety. This bill's goal is to make it possible for all Alaskans in need to receive this vital health care service. The Compact enacted by SB 172 will draw more occupational therapists to live and work in our state and thus improve access to physical therapy for thousands of Alaskans.

[2:56:28 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced invited testimony on SB 172.

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KEITH BUCKHOUT, Policy Analyst, Council of State Government, Lexington, KY, testified by invitation on SB 172. He said the Occupational Therapy (OT) Compact is an agreement among states that allows licensed occupational therapists and assistants to practice across member states through a streamlined process. The OT Compact improves access to care, supports military families, and ensures continuity of services. He said practitioners must hold an active, unencumbered license, complete background checks, and follow the laws of the state where the patient is located. Member states may also require a jurisprudence exam. The OT Compact enhances public protection through shared data on investigations and discipline. It currently has 32 member states in the process of becoming operational for licensees.

[2:59:27 PM](#)

BRIANNA OSWALD, President, Alaska Occupational Therapy Association, Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 172. She stated that the organization represents 173 occupational therapists and therapy practitioners who serve patients across various settings, including schools, hospitals, and community-based clinics, helping individuals improve their independence, life skills, and self-care throughout their lifespan. Currently, Alaska has only one academic program that graduates 8 to 14 occupational therapists each year, which is far below the statewide demand. She said the Alaska Occupational Therapy Association estimates a need for around 77 occupational therapists due to turnover, retirements, and the frequent relocation of military spouses and other professionals. She said as a result, the state relies heavily on practitioners from outside Alaska to meet these needs. She said SB 172 would help address the workforce shortage by reducing bureaucratic barriers, allowing qualified professionals from other states to practice more easily in Alaska.

[3:01:07 PM](#)

KATHLEEN HANSEN, Assistant Director of Rehabilitation, Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC), Juneau, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 172. She said as a hiring manager at SEARHC, she witnessed services for Alaskans across all stages of life in outpatient, inpatient, long-term, home-based, and school-based care. She saw firsthand how licensure delays hindered timely access to care.

[3:02:27 PM](#)

REBECCA DEAN, Public Member, Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy (PTOT) Board, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 172. The PTOT is in support of SB 172 and HB 173 and

stated that the PTOT board could effectively manage the licensing changes and compact privileges outlined in the bills. The PTOT board noted its prior experience implementing the physical therapy compact, which uses similar procedures. She emphasized that the OT compact would improve access to qualified therapists, reduce administrative redundancies, and strengthen patient safety through centralized background checks and shared disciplinary data.

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MS. DEAN stated that the Alaska PTOT Board closely monitored the national success of the Occupational Therapy Compact and conducted extensive education on its implementation. She said the board fully supports adopting the compact, identifying it as a strategic initiative to improve access to care, particularly in rural areas, and reduce administrative burdens for licensed providers. Between July 2024 and May 2025, 82 occupational licenses were approved, and federal agencies have recognized interstate compact licenses for Medicare and Medicaid participation. She emphasized that all applicants would undergo background checks and fingerprinting before qualifying and urged the legislature to pass SB 172 to address workforce shortages and enhance patient access across Alaska.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN concluded invited testimony on SB 172.

[CHAIR BJORKMAN held SB 172 in committee.]

[3:09:03 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Bjorkman adjourned the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting at 3:09 p.m.