



# ALASKA STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees Local 52

---

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 10, 2023

Contact: Samantha Harris, Communications Coordinator  
(907) 750-3224 or [samanthah@afscmelocal52.org](mailto:samanthah@afscmelocal52.org)

## **ASEA AFSCME Local 52 Members Rally to Staff the State to Support Alaska Families**

*Hundreds of thousands of public sector jobs remain vacant across the nation – including a 22% vacancy rate in the Alaska Dept. of Health, interrupting critical public services Alaskans rely on every day*

JUNEAU – On Friday, February 10, ASEA AFSCME Local 52 members were joined by workers, legislators, and other allies to support recruitment and retention efforts for critical public sector jobs in the State of Alaska, including the Division of Public Assistance which has been dealing with a SNAP benefits backlog since September 2022.

ASEA AFSCME Executive Director, Heidi Drygas, shared the following: “Not that long ago, the State of Alaska was a premier place to work. Living wages, pension retirement, healthcare, and a respect for public employees drew Alaskans to public service, where they often remained for the rest of their careers. Budget cuts, substandard benefits, and poor working conditions have taken their toll. Yet we’re encouraged by discussions with legislators and members of the administration that we can finally turn things around and staff our state once again.”

ASEA Ketchikan Chapter President and DPA employee Joey Tillson said: “People are trying desperately to help our neighbors, but we need help. I have seen so many people leave DPA – but I am still here. I stay because if I quit, that is one less person that is here helping feed Alaskans. Staffing DPA helps put food on the table, helps feed Alaskans, and that’s what we need right now, to staff our state!”

Senator Forrest Dunbar (D-Anchorage), who represents working-class neighborhoods in Anchorage, discussed the importance and appetite for the State of Alaska to return to a defined benefit *pension system*: “Vacancies in public service impact all of us. From roads not being plowed, to overcrowding in our schools, to benefit backlogs– our public sectors need help. It’s past time to pay Alaska public employees a fair wage and to give them a dignified retirement for their state service and get the public the services they need.”

Representative Genevieve Mina (D-Anchorage), member of the Health and Social Services Committee who represents some of the poorest neighborhoods in Anchorage, talked about the importance of public assistance: “Public Assistance is government at its best. We’re providing for our most vulnerable— we’re feeding people who are hungry, we are making sure that people who are sick are getting the care and help they need to become successful in our society. For the people that are working at DPA – thank you for staying. You are on the frontlines of these services, providing benefits, and the work you do is so important, we need to make sure you have what you need to stay, to continue processing benefits, and to help Alaskans.”

*ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 is an affiliate of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). AFSCME represents more than 1.4 million public service workers across the country. AFSCME Local 52 is the largest union of state and municipal public service workers in Alaska with more than 8,000 hardworking public employees including within the Division of Public Assistance and other 24-7 facilities that execute critical care that Alaskans rely on every day.*

###