

Alaska Public Employee Unions Come Together and Urge the Dunleavy Administration to Assist Frontline Public Service Workers in Coronavirus Response

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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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ANCHORAGE — Today, Public Employee Union leaders across the state came together to demand immediate discussions on preparation to combat the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) for frontline state, local and municipal public service workers. These leaders met to make sure that the Dunleavy administration and State Legislature are prepared to provide the full resources needed to assist frontline employees to ensure Alaskan's safety. It is crucial that these frontline employees have the support of this Administration so that they can continue to provide critical public services safely. Our unions are ready and eager to work with this Administration to make sure every precaution is taken so that our members can get the job done and keep Alaskans and themselves safe.

Executive Director for the Alaska State Employee Association (ASEA), an affiliate of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Local 52, Jake Metcalfe made the following statement:

Right now, our members don't know if there is a plan in place for their work areas. The Governor announced in a recent press release that they've been working on a plan over the last five weeks. We have not been informed or included in that process. We are currently unaware of how public employees' factor into these plans and would like that information for our members. Our members are worried about safety, their jobs, and leave policies. They have questions. They want to know that the Administration is taking every step necessary to ensure they are safe so that they continue to provide important critical services. AFSCME Local 52/ASEA members include nurses, first responders, and other health care professionals that are on the front lines. It's important that they know this administration has a plan and is willing to put their safety and the safety of Alaska communities first as we prepare for public health risks such as COVID-19.

Business Manager Jordan Adams, with Public Employees Local 71, an affiliate of the Laborers' International Union of North America (LiUNA), expressed the critical importance of a unified effort, saying: "We're all in this together. Local 71 Members were critical to our recent rapid response to sanitize the Anchorage International Airport and keep it operational. We support universal precautions and protection for workers and the public as we Keep Alaska Moving."



Brian Penner, a Business Manager with the Alaska Public Employees Association (APEA), an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) that represents public employee supervisors with the state shared: “State supervisors are critical to ensuring the safety of state employees and the Alaska public. They need to receive up-to-date information and clear direction from this administration to assist them with their response to this developing situation.”

AFSCME Local 52 requested meetings with the Department of Administration and other public employee unions to make sure their members have clear guidance and comfort in knowing that their leaders have their backs as we prepare for the worst. As the situation escalates, union leaders find it necessary to meet with the administration immediately.

To quote AFSCME President Lee Saunders, “Public service workers – including first responders, health care workers, education, home care and childcare as well as public safety workers – deserve this basic assurance: that when they put themselves in harm’s way, their leaders have their backs.”

Collectively, our unions represent approximately 12,000 public employees in Alaska including nurses, first responders, virologists, supervisors, critical airport staff, Pioneer Home staff, public safety workers, and many more frontline employees. They deserve to see a plan. Our unions are eager and willing to work together with this Administration to promote safety on the job to keep Alaska running.

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