



# ALASKA STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

## American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees Local 52

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PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **State Employees Demand that Gov. Dunleavy Act NOW!**

*State Employees came together to share their stories and how the governor's inaction threatens the health and safety of all Alaskans*

ANCHORAGE - State Employees came together on Saturday morning to share their stories and talk about the dangers of the governor's actions to keep offices open to the public, and continue allowing employees to work in congested workspaces.

Amber Barney, a State of Alaska employee that works in the Atwood building shared her experience working in a congested work environment. "Unfortunately, social distancing is very difficult in our building," Barney shared. Barney noted there are approximately 70 people in an open concept space with no walls to separate workers and no sanitation stations. According to Ms. Barney, these spaces do not have fresh air circulation. "Approximately 1,000 employees share 8 elevators," she said. Employees come in and out of the same front doors and share a number of other surfaces. "If someone gets sick – it's going to spread like wildfire," according Barney.

Keeping offices open like this can lend to rapid transmission of this dangerous virus threatening the health and safety of all Alaskans. Another employee works for DOT&PF and shared their experience trying to follow CDC guidelines:

*I have seen pretty much everyone making a concerted effort to stay 6 feet apart when interacting, but there is just not enough space for that. Someone literally pulled out a tape measure the other day and we made a lighthearted but serious attempt at calibrating our sense of distance. Also, it turns out that holding a conversation at six feet requires speaking loudly enough to disrupt everyone's work in the adjacent cubicles. We're trying, but social distancing just doesn't work here.*

Employees came together to say it is past time for the Governor to take decisive action on behalf of all state employees – requiring all that can, to work from home, all that can't to receive paid administrative leave, and all that must continue to work, to be provided with personal protective equipment. After the 7.1 earthquake on November 30, 2018, state employees were sent home on paid administrative leave due to unsafe working conditions. "I don't see how this is different," one employee shared.

The Mayor of the Municipality of Anchorage issued a "Hunker Down" order for Anchorage residents. This order will require all Anchorage residents not engaged in providing critical services for themselves, the public, or their families, to stay at home. The Commissioner for Health and Social Services, Adam Crum responded sending a message to all state of Alaska employees stating that "State agencies must continue to provide services to the public in this time of need.... At this time, SOA employees are to



report to work on Monday under the same circumstances they were working under on Friday March 20, be it via telework or at an office or facility.”

Jake Metcalfe responded to Crum’s message:

*this message, to all state employees, contradicts the efforts of the mayor, and contradicts the advice by our chief medical officer. State employees want to work and do provide critical public services. We want to make sure they can do that by ensuring they are working in safe environments. State employees can’t work if they are sick – and our frontline employees won’t be able to keep up with what’s coming if we don’t work together as an entire state to do our part to flatten the curve. The message from Commissioner Crum is irresponsible. Right now, public employees and Alaskans need true leadership – and state employees need to know that their leaders have their backs. There has been no communication from this administration to help state employees feel that way.*

Business Manager with the Alaska Public Employees Association (APEA), Brian Penner, added:

*The Governor keeps deferring to supervisors to make these decisions as to whether or not employees can work from home. Are these supervisors’ epidemiologists? Do they have any medical training or proper background to make that call during a pandemic? No. The Governor was elected to lead – we are all pleading that he do so, quickly.*

Another employee, Carl Jacobs (DCCED), shared that the process to seek telework permission varies across departments and divisions and encouraged that a consistent policy be put in place. He also observed that social distancing is not feasible in many areas and recommended these factors be considered and addressed.

The President for ASEA/AFSCME Local 52, Dawn Bundick concluded the presentation adding:

*It’s up to all of us to come together right now and do all we can to assist in slowing the spread of transmission which means reduce the amount of people that can congregate which means closing offices to the public and encouraging everyone that possibly can, to work from home, providing those that can’t, with to have paid administrative leave, and those that must work, with proper protective gear and protocols - those directives need to come from our governor, very, very soon! The fear is escalating which is invoking unsettling morale. Not acting, places all Alaskans at risk.*

ASEA/AFSME Local 52 has filed multiple complaints about workplace safety violations with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), seeking immediate relief for employees in congested offices during this pandemic. The union also started a petition to generate public support for protecting the health and safety of all Alaskans by requesting that Governor Dunleavy immediately direct all employees to stay home – allowing telework or paid administrative leave, and provide protective gear and safety protocols for employees that continue to work in a COVID-19 environment.

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