



ALASKA STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees Local 52

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 18, 2020

Contact: Jake Metcalfe, Executive Director

JakeM@afscmelocal52.org

Alaska Public Service Workers Call for Additional State and Local Aid to Keep Communities Safe

AFSCME Local 52 members and State Legislators join on a Bi-Partisan call to urge Congress to increase funding for state and local governments to reduce strain, ensure continued delivery of vital services

ANCHORAGE – Today, Alaska public employees including a nurse at the Sitka Pioneer Home, a Juvenile Justice Officer at the McLaughlin Youth Center, and Eligibility Technician with the Department of Public Assistance, held a press call highlighting front-line efforts to contain the coronavirus. Amid a rapid decrease in revenues, public service workers underscored the urgent need for increased federal funding for state and local governments which are struggling to keep up with the demand for services. Alaska public service workers are leading on-the-ground efforts to respond to COVID-19, often at significant risk and hardship to themselves.

For years, our nation's public service workers have been asked to do more with less. They are rising to the current challenge, but this crisis exposes how shortsighted austerity measures have hurt our ability to respond when our communities need help the most. It is essential for Congress to take bold steps to expand aid to state and local governments right away, so public service workers have the resources to fight this pandemic and protect our communities.

On the call, Executive Director for ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 Jake Metcalfe shared, “Our state and country have suffered a huge health care and economic shock. Essential employees work day and night to keep us out of the hospital and safe from infection. Alaska workers and businesses are also dealing with shutdowns and record unemployment. Our state revenue and consumer spending has evaporated... ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 calls on the U.S. Senate to support funding our front lines NOW!”

ASEA Member, Kelly Ferguson, is a nurse at the Sitka Pioneer Home. She shared that essential workers are at physical and psychological risk while working hard to continue providing essential services including care for our elders at the Pioneer Homes.

Barry Yabyabin is a Juvenile Justice Officer at the McLaughlin Youth Center, a State facility that has confirmed two cases of COVID-19 since March. Yabyabin called on Senators Murkowski and Sullivan to “please hear our call for help! Support this aid package for state and local government!” Barry shared that public service is not just a job, but a calling “to serve the people of Alaska and we’re doing it 24/7, 365 days a year.”

Joey Tillson, Eligibility Technician in Ketchikan. She shared that recent exposures and ignoring mandates might subject the small town of Ketchikan to catastrophic numbers of COVID-19 in the coming days and weeks.

All three state workers stressed that the State and Federal government must do better to make sure essential workers have what they need to continue delivering critical services. This includes access to testing, PPE, and hazard pay as workers continue to put themselves at risk to provide for citizens in need of services.

We also heard State Legislators. Representative Kopp (R-Anchorage) and Senator Gray-Jackson (D-Anchorage) joined ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 on calling for necessary Federal aid State and Local governments. Rep. Kopp encouraged our US Senators to consider and empower State Legislators that know best how to appropriate this critical funding. Rep. Kopp also shared “I appreciate hearing from the employee that works in the Pioneer Home, my Mom is in the Pioneer Home – I appreciate our state workers that take care of our parents and Grandparents.” The Representative also shared the critical work local government workers are doing in Bristol Bay to support our important salmon fishery and industry. “I want to give a big shout out to our public employees who have not slowed down - The HEROES Act is a critical piece of legislation that will better address the needs of local government and have provisions in there including hazard pay – [Public Employees] are certainly in high risk situations – we have hundreds of groups of employees on the frontline that are making sure our state is running during a very difficult time.”

Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson thanked public employees for their service and tireless work keeping Alaskans safe and our state running. “In order to keep Alaska safe, we need to assure the safety of the essential workers who are on the Frontlines everyday keeping the rest of us safe. They must have the resources they need, including PPE, training and access to testing in order to continue providing critical services during this crisis and as we cautiously move toward re-opening. I stand with ASEA in calling on our congressional delegation to explore every avenue possible to secure the resources our State and Municipalities need to fight this disease and recover stronger than we were before.”

You can listen to the recorded press conference by using this weblink: <https://soundcloud.com/user-490500411/asea-afscme-local-52-press-call-fund-the-frontlines>

ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 is the largest union of state and municipal public service workers in Alaska with more than 8,000 hardworking public employees. The Alaska State Employees Association (ASEA) is an affiliate of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) which represent approximately 1.6 million public employees in the United States. ASEA members safeguard our water, manage our natural resources, clear our roads, inspect our bridges, and plan for the transportation of tomorrow. They protect consumers and promote a healthy economy. They shelter our children and connect Alaska families to vital services. ASEA members perform clerical and administrative functions that effective government requires. Our members fight fires and protect property. They take emergency calls and dispatch public safety officers for people in need. ASEA members care for people from all walks of life to ensure they have the services they need to live with dignity and respect. They work everywhere Alaska needs them, providing critical public services Alaskans depend on.

***AFSCME members may be available for media requests. If interested, email
SamanthaH@afscmelocal52.org.***

###