



ALASKA STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees Local 52

Press Release

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ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 Calls on Governor Dunleavy to Lead!

As cases continue to climb, ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 asks the State to implement strict controls to slow and stop the spread of COVID-19 to protect the health and safety of all Alaskans.

ANCHORAGE –Today, the Alaska State Employees Association (ASEA) held a virtual town hall with Keith Wrightson, a health and safety expert with AFSCME, Jake Metcalfe, Executive Director of ASEA, and Representative Zack Fields to discuss worker protections from coronavirus (the virus that causes COVID-19) in the absence of any significant mandates from the Dunleavy Administration.

There have been numerous outbreaks of COVID-19 across the state, including infections at several 24-hour facilities that house some of our most vulnerable populations. ASEA has been pressing the State to implement strong controls to slow the spread of the virus and keep state employees – and the Alaskans they serve – safe, as the pandemic continues to impact our communities. Last week, despite outbreaks in the Alaska Pioneer Homes, Correction facilities, Alaska Military Youth Academy, and the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API), Governor Dunleavy was quoted in an Anchorage Daily News article stating “certainly, we could probably shut the virus down. But then the cost to do that would be, in my opinion, astronomical.” ASEA interprets this as surrender to the virus which is unacceptable and violates numerous health and safety protections that are guaranteed to workers by federal and state law, and by our contracts.

The Governor and members of his Administration, including commissioners Crum and Tshibaka, were invited to attend this meeting but declined. Questions from members on the call revealed that after eight months, there is still inconsistent information causing confusion and stress to employees who are doing their best to continue delivering critical services while staying safe.

Executive Director, Jake Metcalfe shared the need to work together:

“We are in a crisis. We have been patiently trying to work with the state on this since early March. We appreciate the steps that have been taken but more is urgently needed. Let’s get a plan in place, meet regularly, and do this work together to keep our members safe. Alaska lives are on the line.”

Representative Zack Fields stressed a statewide mask mandate:

“We can’t keep people safe if we can’t control this virus, generally. If this virus is running rampant in our communities, unchecked, it will find its way into our long-term care facilities despite our best efforts. We can’t let failed leadership hurt those communities that aren’t able to



implement their own mandates. A statewide mask mandate would be a tremendous step but we seem to have a governor that's asleep at the wheel and refusing to accept the reality of our situation."

ASEA is requesting that the State follow and enforce its own mandates, including mask wearing in state facilities. Another major request is to work together on a crisis communication plan for notifying members of outbreaks and providing them with necessary information about their potential exposure, access to testing, and PPE with adequate training.

The Health and Safety expert with AFSCME, Keith Wrightson, shared that it's important to develop standard protocols as much as possible because this is likely going to be our world for the next two years.

"Despite what you might be hearing on the news, this virus is not going away anytime soon. If you look at historic pandemics, it will be amazing if this 'goes away' in two years. The most likely scenario is that a vaccine will be available to essential employees by early next year – but a fully-dosed vaccine for the general public might not be available until early 2022. And that would be record-breaking considering previous pandemics."

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. 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. ASEA members provide essential services that Alaskans rely on every day including providing for our most vulnerable Alaskans in the Pioneer Homes, at API, and in Corrections and Youth facilities. ASEA members are on the frontline of this pandemic. We can't fight this pandemic without their work and dedication. 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 and keep Alaska running! Their employer should afford them similar respect and dignity by looking out for their health and safety.

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