



ALASKA STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees Local 52

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 calls on Governor to take real actions re COVID-19 spread in Alaska
The Governor sent Alaskans an emergency alert with a link to a YouTube video on Thursday morning with no new information or clear leadership regarding uncontrollable spread of the disease

ANCHORAGE –Today, Governor Mike Dunleavy utilized the emergency alert system for the first time to text all Alaskans with a link to a YouTube video. In the video, the governor speaks to Alaskans urging them to take the matter of COVID-19 mitigation into their own hands instead of implementing strong mandates or guidelines that could actually have an impact.

Since early March of this year, ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 has implored Governor Dunleavy to develop clear workplace safety mitigation plans that will stop or limit the spread of the virus. We are still waiting for that plan. The Governor instead makes general statements about the need to telework, wear masks, and distance at work. Yet numerous ASEA members share that these ‘requests’ are ignored, not honored or enforced and that some people in management refuse to take the COVID-19 pandemic seriously.

ASEA has reached out to Governor Dunleavy with an offer to collaborate and help create a workplace crisis communication plan for prompt and clear communication around COVID-19. Governor Dunleavy has not responded to our offer, so we assume it has been rejected. Likewise, Governor Dunleavy has ignored or rejected numerous requests from ASEA to bargain, negotiate and collaborate on better health and safety policies for state employees. It is unfortunate that this Administration is not interested in leadership regarding state employees’ health and safety concerns.

To protect ASEA members, ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 is educating state employers about the best practices for controlling COVID-19 in the workplace. At emergency town hall meetings, ASEA has presented guidance from health and safety experts, and industrial hygienists with clear and specific guidelines for mitigating hazards related to a virus that is spread primarily by aerosolized transmission. Earlier, following an ASEA town hall meeting about rapid spread of COVID-19, Representative Zack Fields stressed the need for 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.”



In response to today's emergency alert, Executive Director, Jake Metcalfe said,

“This is like the movie Ground Hog’s Day. At every meeting, the Governor repeats his lecture and pep talk and nothing changes. This is a crisis. The Governor needs to make some tough calls that protect Alaskans. This includes a mask mandate, testing for anyone that needs it, and regular, timely and substantive communications from the Governor about his crisis.”

Therefore, ASEA Local 52 once again implores the Governor to enforce a statewide mask mandate, work with us on a crisis communication plan for notifying public employees and Alaskans of outbreaks, including information about potential exposure risks, provide Alaskans with access to free COVID-19 testing, provide state employees with plentiful and adequate PPE, and impose workplace safety standards and protocols.

ASEA members continue to receive conflicting and confusing information causing more unnecessary additional stress and angst in an already difficult and unfamiliar time. ASEA stands by ready and willing to help in these matters at any time.

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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