



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 took action today to protect all Alaskans by requiring the SOA to adhere to CDC guidelines for state employees amid the COVID-19 pandemic

ANCHORAGE - State employees continue to voice concerns over the health and safety of Alaskans they serve, as well as their own well-being, so long as the Dunleavy Administration takes no action to reduce work in congested offices without the ability to practice social distancing of 6 feet, and without access to sanitizing solutions or proper protective equipment. In his press conferences and in his own messages to employees, the Governor asks employees to work from home if they can and to work with their supervisors to get telework approval. But in reality, employees' supervisors are being denied the ability to grant permission from upper management, which is effectively an arm of the Administration. This confusion and inconsistent messaging is delaying necessary safety measures, risking the health and safety of all Alaskans during a pandemic.

Over the course of the last few weeks, ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 raised concerns with the Administration in order to bring awareness of employees being denied telework or adequate preparation with the proper safety gear and sanitizing equipment for frontline duties. Absent any replies, the Administration appears to disagree with generally accepted safety protocols, leaving the union with no other choice but to seek immediate assistance from the courts after numerous attempts of seeking relief for employees.

Jake Metcalfe, Executive Director for AFSCME Local 52 made the following statement:

Our contract guarantees employees safety and security in the workplace. A pandemic does not mean that our contract goes out the window. This is when it is especially important that we look out for everyone's health and safety due to the high rate of transmission of this virus. We aren't asking for state government to shut down – we're asking that non-essential staff who are able to work from home, to be given that permission – and for critical staff who must continue to work, to have the ability to practice proper social distancing and to have access to hand sanitizer and other cleaning products for wiping down shared surfaces. We're also asking for relief from delays in processing telework agreements and for paid administrative leave for employees who can work from home but are waiting for logistics to get worked out. We know this is complicated, this isn't anything any of us were prepared for – but it's critical that we work together to look out for the health and safety of all Alaskans which means requiring as much as your workforce as possible to work from home.

Amber Barney, a State of Alaska employee who reports to the Atwood Building in Anchorage, shared her experience working in a congested office environment. “Unfortunately, social distancing is very difficult in our building,” Barney noted. She explained 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 to Barney.

Keeping offices open like this can lead to rapid transmission of this dangerous virus, compounding a threat to the health and safety of all Alaskans. Another employee who works for DOT&PF 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.

Molly Brown, legal counsel for ASEA/AFSCME Local 52, described the Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) and Injunction that was filed today:

ASEA’s request for injunctive relief asks the Court to enforce the Administration’s own social distancing and telework policies for the benefit of state employees. The Administration has promised employees that it will provide staggered work schedules, a safe work environment that satisfies the Administration’s social distancing policies, and a move towards allowing employees to telework. The court filing today provided several examples of instances where the Administration is failing its employees by not putting employee safety first, arbitrarily denying telework requests, and failing to provide the necessary social distance in the workplace.

ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 submitted a petition with more than 400 signatures to the Governor on Monday, March 23, urging him to take immediate action.

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 safeguarding our water, managing our natural resources, clearing our roads, inspecting our bridges, and planning 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 and must be afforded necessary protections to help “flatten the curve” of the coronavirus.

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