



Thank you, co-chairs and committee members, for the invitation to testify today. For the record, my name is Kati Capozzi, and I serve as the President and CEO at the Alaska Chamber. The Alaska Chamber was founded in 1953, and our mission is to advocate for a healthy business environment in Alaska. The Chamber has more than 700 members and represents businesses of all sizes and industries from across the state.

The Alaska Chamber supports the passage of HB76.

Businesses in Alaska have suffered immensely over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and one year into this public health and economic crisis, many are struggling to keep their doors open. Despite the twists and turns the business community has endured, we *are* beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel and plotting our course for recovery. Economic recovery, however, hinges on our continued vigilant response to COVID-19.

The true economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to Alaska is yet to be determined, especially considering recent policy actions outside of Alaska's control that effectively shut down the largest portion of our tourism industry for at least another season. What we do have concrete data on are job losses. According to the Alaska Department of Labor, there were 44,000 fewer jobs during peak employment months in 2020 than there were in 2019. Virtually every industry in Alaska was negatively impacted, some far more significantly than others. The oil and gas and hospitality industries were hardest hit, each ending 2020 with nearly thirty percent fewer employees in their workforce than the year prior.

It's never been clearer that healthy people are the foundation of a healthy economy. Addressing public health concerns contributes to Alaska's ability to recover. While Alaska has had lower case counts and hospitalizations, and we lead the nation in vaccinations per capita, it is more important than ever we keep the tools in place that allowed for this positive trend.

The Chamber wants to be clear that, from the business community's perspective, providing the State with the appropriate authorities and tools to continue COVID-19 response and recovery does *not* represent more restrictions and burdensome mandates. Quite the opposite.

Before the emergency declaration expired in February, the Chamber expressed concern that any lapse in the state's ability to receive and extend health care resources immediately impedes the progress we've made and adds unacceptable uncertainty to our collective recovery, both from a health and economic perspective. Without some of the regulatory flexibility provisions provided within HB76, operations throughout the state and across many industries, particularly the healthcare industry, are forced to do their best to comply with confusing and unclear guidance. This unnecessarily adds increased uncertainty to the business community.

I'll end my testimony by emphasizing the need for action. The Chamber supports passage of HB76, or any legislation that provides the State authority to effectively address ongoing COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. Our economic health is depending on it. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



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