

Speaking on the Senate floor when my Senate Bill 134 passed the Senate at the end of April.

May 29, 2024

The 33rd legislature is now one for the books! The Senate gavelled out right before midnight on May 15th after passing a balanced budget with a respectable level of capital spending to begin addressing the longstanding backlog of deferred maintenance and crumbling infrastructure around the state.

I was able to get an appropriation for millions of dollars for capital projects right in my own Senate District F! This includes important safety measures such as school and other pedestrian crossings, road maintenance, and other project funding. Our neighborhood schools and the university will also receive funding to work on projects that have languished for years. While there is more work to be done with education funding increases and policy changes in the future, we made a few steps forward this session.

Meanwhile, we were able to pass 10 of my office's priorities ranging from improved data security to helping our citizens interact more effectively with the federal government on land use issues. We also spearheaded much needed updates to our workforce development with reforms to our workers' compensation laws.

We obtained the ability to issue commemorative license plates for fallen peace officers, while I also worked to contribute to legislation that will transform our rail belt energy system.

Speaking of railroads, we also successfully carried legislation to enable the Alaska Railroad to build a new cruise ship dock in Seward. If that wasn't enough, we also addressed the housing shortage by proposing and passing authorization for the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation to acquire a much needed work space that will help them provide improved efficiency as they work to maintain low income housing access.

All in all, we were incredibly busy, productive, and quite successful. I am grateful for my colleagues, my staff, and all of the individuals from state agencies, our city, and individual stakeholders who made these successes possible.

As a Legislature, we addressed key issues such as energy, transportation, security and education, both funding for schools and protection for the correspondence program.

There's so much more that I could mention here, but as always, see below for the full story and complete details. If you have any questions just give me a call or send us an email!

As always, there is much more information below, so take a look and let me know if you have any questions or comments! You can call me anytime at 907-465-4949 and keep up with day-to-day things on [my Facebook page](#).

Regards,

JK

The Operating Budget: The Highlights

In my last newsletter, we still had a Senate version and a House version of the state's Operating Budget. The next step in the budget process was to form a "conference committee" which is made up of three House members and three Senate members with the goal of settling differences between the two versions.

The conference committee met during the last week of session and settled on a final Operating Budget which passed the Senate by a 17-3 vote and the House by a 22-18 vote on the last day of session. While my colleagues and I are done with our work on the budget, it now goes to the Governor who will be able to make his vetoes (reductions or deletions of individual line-items in the budget) before signing the budget into law.

Operating Budget Highlights:

(see the next section for more info on the Fiscal Budget)

High level: The total amount spent in the budget for Fiscal Years 2023, 2024, and 2025 is pretty much flat. About 80 to 100 million dollars for FY24 go towards savings, and the budget for FY25 is about \$8 million in the black. This is cutting it pretty close, but the budget, including operating expenditures, capital expenditures, and the PFD balances and doesn't require any draws from savings.

PFD: The final legislative budget this year includes a \$1360 Permanent Fund Dividend and an Energy Relief Check of about \$295, totaling \$1,655 per person. This PFD and energy relief will be **mailed out as a combined check this fall**.

Education: Other highlights in the budget include one time funding for school districts equal to a \$680 BSA increase, reading instruction increases, and pupil transportation funding. Funding to fulfill the federal Maintenance of Equity requirements in an effort to remove Alaska's "High-Risk" designation. There is also grant funding for Alaska Resource Education and Hunter Education.

Anchorage: The Department of Transportation received an increase in their budget for snow removal statewide. My Anchorage colleagues and I talked with DOT extensively about ways to avoid repeating the snow plowing challenges our city has faced the last two years. While this money is not allocated to Anchorage specifically, it is designed to help DOT respond better to abnormally large snow events and will hopefully help prevent the days-long (and even weeks-long) dig-out periods

Statehood Defense: Funding for Department of Law to continue Alaska's Statehood Defense efforts is included.

Government Efficiency: There are quite a few information technology projects across state government to improve payroll, program delivery, program efficiency, and much more.

Energy: The Alaska Gasline Development Corporation received funding to keep it running for another year and language is included that directs the corporation to pursue a third-party economic analysis of the pipeline proposals.

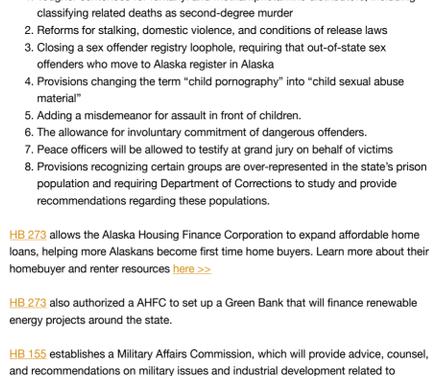
Marketing Alaska: Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute received grant funding in an effort to increase Alaska's seafood export activity. Funding was also included to help market Alaska as a tourism destination.

And much more! I'm happy to explain further if you reach out to the office with specific questions:

Call: (907) 465-4949

Email: Sen.James.Kaufman@akleg.gov

Facebook: [@SenatorKaufman](#)



Capital Budget: Priority Projects for our District

I am excited to report that, for the first time in many years, the Legislature passed a meaningful capital budget. Anchorage will see significant investments through the statewide transportation improvement program, the Anchorage transportation improvement plan, and several city-wide projects. On top of that, I helped secure a little over \$3.5 million worth of discretionary funds for top-priority projects in our District that would not otherwise have been included in the other pots of money.

I focused on projects that addressed school-children crossing safety to O'Malley Elementary school (specifically where many children cross O'Malley at Rockridge Drive), Service High School, and Trailside Elementary. Another top priority was securing planning money for a pedestrian safety and traffic calming project to address the dangerous situations at the 84th Avenue and Coventry Drive intersections along Elmore Road.

Other projects I helped include in the budget were for road rehabilitation for several of our neighborhood roads, and matching funds for recreation and park access projects. For several of these projects, more money may be required in the future to complete the project, but with these targeted investments, we will be able to get the ball rolling.

The budget now goes off to the Governor's desk. He will have the opportunity to veto specific projects and sign the rest into law. We have a good list of modest projects that meet needs our community has been requesting for years. I am hopeful we are able to see all of them approved by the Governor.

Purpose	Dollar Amount
Abbott Rd Safe Routes to Schools Improvements	\$910,837
Campbell Atstrip Road Rebuild for those Sections not Completed in the 2017 Rehabilitation Project	\$500,000
Safe Pedestrian Crossings for O'Malley Elementary School	\$400,000
AK Child & Family - Remodel of Bathrooms at Residential Facility	\$389,163
Service Singletrack Trail Project	\$385,000
Elmore Rd/84th Ave-Coventry Traffic and Pedestrian Safety Improvements	\$300,000
Hillside LRSA / RRSa Drainage and Ditching	\$240,000
Meadow Park - Picnic Shelter, Sidewalk, & Parking Improvements	\$225,000
Basel Street Rehab - 72nd Ave To Lore Road	\$150,000
Sum Total	\$3,500,000

All of these projects are the top priority projects for the community councils in my district, which are a great resource for capital project input. If you're not currently attending your local community council, I highly recommend it! The primary community councils in our area are Hillside Community Council (District 11), Huffman/O'Malley Community Council (District 11), and Abbott Loop Community Council (District 12). I encourage you to visit communitycouncils.org and get engaged.

[Find your Community Council](#)



Seven of My Bills Pass the Legislature

The final hours of the 33rd Legislature were busy ones! I am thrilled to report that **seven of my bills passed** (four in my original bill, and three more in different bills where they fit better). This section describes each of my bills that passed. The next sections include information about other important legislation that passed this session such as energy, education, and other improvements.

Helping Alaskans Get Back to Work | SB 147

There was a growing consensus and recognition that Alaska's employment system was not working effectively. Of the workers hurt on the job who applied for the unemployment benefits they paid into, relatively few successfully made it through the process and into another meaningful job. Over the last year, I collaborated with the Division of Workers Compensation to craft **SB 147** to address the shortcomings of the system and to more effectively reintegrate injured workers back into the workforce.

One of the key aspects of SB 147 is its focus on refining the regulations governing reemployment rights for injured workers. The legislation provides clearer guidelines for employers and better support for their employees—aligning Alaska's system with broader efforts to modernize the reemployment system to meet the needs of our constantly evolving job market.

Through the legislative process and in collaboration with my colleagues in the House, additional provisions were added to the bill, including a robust stay-at-work program, a stronger **workers' compensation quantum rule** (which will address the growing number of people forced to wait months for payments they are owed), better PTSD support for first responders, and an extension to **unior benefits funding**.

SB 147 passed the Legislature with near-unanimous support (the vote was 58-1) and now heads to the Governor's desk for his signature.

Re-establishing the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Areas | SB 34

For decades, CACFA monitored federal rules and actions taken on federal land in Alaska and ensured that individual Alaskans had a place to go to understand and engage constructively with those federal decisions that affected them. It was a source of institutional knowledge on the major laws that govern how our land is used, it helped Alaskans navigate federal permitting processes, and most importantly, was an entity focused on constructively advocating for Alaskans to policy makers on the federal level.

The commission sunset in 2021 (though it had been unfunded since 2016), and this year, the legislature overwhelmingly supported its reinstatement (the vote was 51-5). It is off to the Governor's desk for his signature.

If you want to learn more about how CACFA served Alaskans, you can visit its archived [website here](#) (it will be updated again once the Commission gets up and running again).

Peace Officer Memorial Plates | SB 95

Everyday, peace officers who have sworn to protect us put themselves in harm's way to preserve the peace and protect their fellow citizens. Originally submitted as its own bill (**SB 26**), I worked with Senator Merrick's office to integrate my bill to create specialty license plates dedicated to fallen Peace officers into **SB 95**. These specialty plates will commemorate police officers, State troopers, VPSO's, officers of the court, and Department of Corrections employees who have been killed in the line of duty. These specialty plates will be available for anyone to purchase in the near future. Keep an eye out in future newsletters for a link!

Special thanks to Doug Fifer, a long time veteran of the Anchorage Police Department, who has worked for 9 years (and with my office for the last three of those years) to get these plates created.

Approving Major Infrastructure and Securing Economic Growth for Southcentral Alaska | HB 122

The Port of Seward is a tourism hub in Southcentral Alaska. Most cruise ship voyages begin or end in Seward, meaning visitors disembark in Seward will travel on to the Kenai Peninsula or north through Anchorage, Denali, and even Fairbanks.

The cruise ship dock in Seward was built in 1966 and has reached the end of its lifespan. HB 122 (the House version of my SB 105) authorizes the Alaska Railroad to secure up to \$135 million in revenue bonds to finance the replacement of the dock infrastructure. The Railroad and their cruise line partner, Royal Caribbean Group, are ready to enter into a long-term anchor tenet contract to pay for the entire project.

This project will ensure that the Port will continue to support small businesses and the broader tourism industry in Southcentral, the Interior, and beyond. HB 122 now heads off to the Governor's desk for his signature.

Protecting Alaskan's Data from Cyber Attacks & Expanding Access to Affordable Mammograms | SB 134

My legislation designed to enhance the security of Alaskans' personal sensitive data passed the Legislature with resounding support. It now heads to the Governor's desk for his signature.

SB 134 came about from growing concerns following a number of cybersecurity threats and high-profile data breaches (both in Alaska and nationally) in the last several years. I worked with the Division of Insurance and the National Association of Insurance Commissioners to craft legislation modeled after the best practices in other states that included various tweaks to cater to Alaska's unique market.

Recognizing the critical need for better safeguards, this legislation mandates that insurance companies in Alaska conduct a full risk assessment of their internal and external threats, and then develop, implement, and maintain an information security program based on those threats.

Mammogram Access: Along the way, we were presented with the opportunity to address a gap in how state health insurance companies cover the costs of supplemental mammograms.

One in eight women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime, and it is the second deadliest cancer among women in the US. When detected early, breast cancer is treatable. However, while screening mammograms are fully covered by insurance, follow-up diagnostic mammograms are not, posing a cost barrier to those at a higher risk of cancer.

SB 134 passed with language that ensures supplemental mammograms are covered at no cost to the insured under applicable state health insurance plans. Regular mammogram save lives, and this bill (once signed into law) will remove a substantial barrier for women who need them the most.

I am proud to have championed this legislation that works towards enhancing the data security position of the insurance industry as well as removing the costs of mammograms for the insured. Stay tuned for more updates!

Increasing Efficiency to Support Affordable Housing | SB 205

The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation manages over 1600 units of affordable public housing around the state. As their units age, the burden to maintain these units grows. Senate Bill 205 allows the AHC to purchase a building in East Anchorage that they can use as a maintenance and training hub.

AHFC currently is leasing the property, but is hesitant to make renovations and improvements if they are not the owner. Ownership of this property will enable them to more efficiently plan, stage, and deploy personnel, materials, and equipment to service their properties in Anchorage and statewide (as a containerization hub). SB 205 awaits the Governor's signature and then AHFC will begin negotiations to buy the building.

Commercial Guide Concession Program | SB 189

For decades, the number of commercial guides who can lead hunts on state-owned lands has not been limited. In a number of problem areas around the state, this reality has led to chronic overcrowding and overutilization of the animal populations in that area. As more guides compete with each other and with resident hunters, guides are incentivized to aggressively "race for the game," decreasing quality of experience for guided clients, increasing conflicts between commercial users and adventuring the general public, resident hunters, subsistence users, private property owners (who are not limited by this bill).

I introduced Senate Bill 253 with the intent to solve this long-standing problem by creating a guide concession program which will first be implemented on one game management unit or subunit that has this overcrowding issue. In subsequent years, other problem areas can be nominated for a concession program on a case by case basis.

The language is modeled after the [recommendations of the Guide Concession Program Workgroup](#) (formed by the Big Game Commercial Services Board) which conducted their review from January to October 2023.

This language originated in my **SB 253** and the House Resources Committee bill **HB 396**, but was amended into SB 189 on the last day of session. SB 189 now heads to the Governor for his signature!

Key Policies that Passed this Session

The legislature as a whole passed major legislation in a number of areas this year, as well as left a few things on the table. In this section I'll describe some of the important legislation that made it through the whole process.

Energy:

Two major pieces of energy legislation passed this year: HB 50 and HB 307.

HB 50 provides a regulatory framework for carbon storage projects in Alaska. There is still a lengthy regulatory package development process that will happen next and will include further public engagement. Alongside the carbon storage provisions there were other provisions opening up Geothermal development, regulating gas storage facilities, making certain seismic data free, and providing a framework for AIDEA to investigate loans to gas producers backed by proven reserves. Reserve-based lending is an interesting idea and could possibly make capital much more accessible for producers.

HB 307 is another major piece of energy-related legislation that passed this year which began as a way to level the playing field for independent power producers and increase competition across power generation sources. Along the way, provisions were added to create a "Railbelt Transmission Organization" tasked with overseeing and developing primary transmission assets and subject to appropriate regulation. The Alaska Energy Authority board was also made independent from AIDEA and the board composition tweaked.

Education:

SB 140 was vetoed and the legislature failed to override the veto, but many other beneficial pieces of legislation passed this year.

The recent correspondence school court ruling sent a new shock through the education system. **HB 202** sponsored by Representative DeLena Johnson became the vehicle for a short-term correspondence fix. HB 202 addresses opioid overdose prevention in public schools by requiring schools to have access to opioid overdose treatment and to employ people trained in administering these treatments. Added late in the process was language requiring DEED to write regulations aligning the correspondence allotment program with the court rulings and establishing standards for Individual Learning Plans.

HB 230 was a bill sponsored by Representative Rebecca Hirmschoot which makes it easier to re-hire retired teachers or hire out-of-state teachers with experience. The Senate added to this bill a certificated teacher incentive bonus which would provide \$5000 to teachers who receive and maintain a national board certification.

HB 148 was the Alaska Performance Scholarship bill which removed barriers, lengthened the notification periods, and increased the maximum award.

As mentioned above, there was also one-time funding in the final budget, which is equivalent to a BSA increase of a \$680. We will come back at fixing the underlying BSA formula next year.

Here are a few other notable pieces of legislation that passed: (You can see a [full list here](#)):

HB 66 is an omnibus crime bill including provisions related to feltny) and methamphetamine, stalking, sex offender registry, child sexual abuse material, and more. It is one of the most crime-victim assistance oriented bills passed by the Alaska Legislature in decades. Here is a full list:

1. Tougher sentences for feltny) and methamphetamine distributors, including classifying related deaths as second-degree murder
2. Reforms for stalking, domestic violence, and conditions of release laws
3. Closing a sex offender registry loophole, requiring that out-of-state sex offenders who move to Alaska register in Alaska
4. Provisions changing the term "child pornography" into "child sexual abuse material"
5. Adding a misdemeanor for assault in front of children.
6. The allowance for involuntary commitment of dangerous offenders.
7. Peace officers will be allowed to testify at grand jury on behalf of victims
8. Provisions recognizing certain groups are over-represented in the state's prison population and requiring Department of Corrections to study and provide recommendations regarding these populations.

HB 273 helps the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation to expand affordable home loans, allowing more Alaskans becoming first time home buyers. Learn more about their homeowner and renter resources [here >>>](#)

HB 273 also authorized a AHFC to set up a Green Bank that will finance renewable energy projects around the state.

HB 155 establishes a Military Affairs Commission, which will provide advice, counsel, and recommendations on military issues and industrial development related to military issues to the Governor, state agencies, the legislature, and our federal congressional delegation.

SB 113 will help improve cost transparency for our UAA, UAF, and UAS students by requiring the universities to display the costs of extra course materials before they sign up for classes. In the future, professors will be encouraged to consider costs when choosing course materials and students will be able to factor extra costs into their class choices.

SB 95 fixes an issue preventing CDL holders from other counties from seeking their CDL in Alaska in a timely manner. This is the second of two changes made in the last year (the first was my SB 123 passed last session) to get more folks into the workforce and help alleviate our state's trucker shortage

HB 104 will help reduce wildfire and public safety risks by allowing the state to pursue the expedited sale of timber that poses a heightened wildfire threat, has been killed by beetles, or will see a dramatic drop in value in the near future.

SB 45 allows healthcare providers and patients enter into subscription-style agreements for certain routine visits and/or health care services. The agreements, usually held in addition to normal health insurance plans, allow doctors and patients to work directly together without the , reducing

If you have questions or would like to talk more about any of these issues, reach out! I am happy to help!

Phone: (907) 465-4949

Email: Sen.James.Kaufman@akleg.gov

Anchorage Delegation Round Up

Another role I had the privilege of serving in during the 33rd Legislature was as co-chair of the Anchorage Delegation. The delegation met biweekly throughout the sessions to work on issues important to all 14 of us who serve Anchorage, Eagle River and Girdwood.

Last year we succeeded in maintaining a \$75 million dollar grant to the Municipality of Anchorage for the Don Young Port of Alaska modernization project. This year we worked on and succeeded in securing more funding for snow-removal and shelters for our cities homeless population. We also had our annual Anchorage Delegation Town Hall on the UAA campus which many of you attended and where we got to hear the issues affecting you in our city.

As a delegation, we sent several letters advocating for Anchorage and our state as a whole. Most recently, we spearheaded sending a letter of support to the US Department of Commerce for grant funding for the Anchorage Community Development Authority's Abandoned Properties Project. The ADCDC's Abandoned Properties Project would help revitalize vacant or abandoned properties to improve our neighborhoods and help address the Anchorage housing shortage.

In all, I was proud of the work the Anchorage Delegation was able to accomplish with such a diverse group of legislators that included both Democrats and Republicans in the state House and Senate and I hope to build on these successes in the future.

Senate Transportation Committee Roundup

The Senate Transportation Committee rounded out this session with behind-the-scenes work on the state's Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (the STIP) and a lot of committee time focused on considering bills. In the past two years, my focus as chair of the committee has been on snow removal issues in the winter, funding for the critical Port of Alaska in Anchorage (now the Don Young Port), and seeing the Alaska Marine Highway System stabilize and efficiently plan for the future.

I am happy to say that while Anchorage had its challenges again this past winter, the legislature took a hard look at how to ensure that the Department of Transportation is better prepared for the future. The \$200 million secured by myself and my Anchorage colleagues two years ago has been leveraged for other federal grants and has been put to work in Phase 2 of the project. And the AMHS has been steadily building toward completing and implementing a long-range plan (that plan is now open for [public comment here](#)).

Transportation in Alaska is a big issue that looks different for every community across the state. It has been an honor to work on these big topics for the past two years. I believe we have made headway in some critical areas and I look forward to continuing the work in this and other areas important to our district next session.

What's Coming Up This Summer!

As we move into what is known as the interim I look forward in continuing to work with all of you to ensure that we continue to do the important work necessary to move Alaska forward towards a better future.

My core legislation, the GDP-based spending cap and Executive Budget Act reform, aimed at stabilizing state spending and Alaska's government operations never got their full vetting so I plan to continue to develop, socialize, and promote the necessity of such legislation. My other proposals such as improving Alaska's IT project execution, making Alaska's regulatory framework and business environment more innovation friendly, and anchoring Alaska's adventure economy also didn't make the cut this year so those will continue to be worked as well.

Alongside those existing proposals, my legislative agenda has some open space after passing legislation this year, so I will work on crafting more high-value proposals that align with my top-line priorities of Security, Stability, and Innovation. If you'd like to know more or become a partner on some of these legislative ideas feel free to reach out or check out my website or Facebook page!

That being said, I also want to hear from you on all other matters! Whether you have an opinion you would like to express or if you need help with something government-related, please reach out via email or phone call and I will do the best to assist you. Enjoy your summer and I look forward to hearing from you!

Need to reach you?

By Phone: Monday-Friday, 9am to 5pm

By Email: Anytime!

For the College-Bound:

[Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#)

[Alaska Performance Scholarship](#)

Find Your Community Council

Huffman/O'Malley Community Council Meeting

Thursday, June 20, begins 7:00PM
In-person at Huffman Elementary School, 12000 Lorraine St., Anchorage, AK 99516
Also available on Zoom: [Zoom Link](#) | Meeting ID: 941 5287 1929 | Passcode: 320438
[Full agenda will be available here >>>](#)

Abbott Loop Community Council Meeting

Annual Community Picnic & Potluck!
Tuesday, June 25th, 4-8pm
Abbott Loop Community Park Pavilion at 8101 Elmore Rd
Please Sign Up to help out [HERE!](#)
[Learn more here >>>](#)

Hillside Community Council Meeting

Possibly June 5, 6:30-8:30PM
Check online for meeting date confirmation
In-person at Trailside Elementary, 15151 Abbott Rd., Anchorage, AK 99507
Also available on Zoom: [Zoom Link](#) | Meeting ID: 844 8192 6062 | Passcode: ALCC
[Full agenda will be available here >>>](#)

Hillside Home & Land Owners (HALO)

Check online for meeting dates, typically 7:00PM
[Full agenda will be available here >>>](#)

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[Sen.James.Kaufman@akleg.gov](#) | (907) 465-4949 | [Check out our Website](#)

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