



For Immediate Release

July 2, 2019

Alaska Regional Coalition Urges Lawmakers to Override Budget Vetoes to Protect Alaska Values and People

The Alaska Regional Coalition urges the Alaska State Legislature to call a special session to override the \$444 million in vetoes to the FY20 operating budget without delay. The vetoes rolled out last week threaten to undermine public health and safety, cost thousands of jobs, harm children and the elderly, forfeit tens of millions in federal match funds, and plunge the state into economic decline.

Kawerak President Melanie Bahnke stated, “The Nome Youth Facility will likely close as a result of these cuts. This means the chance to embrace and rehabilitate our youth from the 28 communities surrounding Nome and Kotzebue in a culturally appropriate setting will be ripped out from under us. Alaska Native culture is a protective factor for our at-risk youth. We cannot see these young people sent out of our region; here they have the best chance of developing into productive community members.”

Maniilaq Association President/CEO Tim Gilbert stated, “As a tribal health provider, we see first-hand how Medicaid means the difference between access to care and suffering. When people are suffering, it can be impossible to hunt, fish, participate in the cash economy, and otherwise care for their family. The legislature implemented cost containment measures for Medicaid in the adopted operating budget. We cannot balance the budget on the backs of the health status of vulnerable Alaskans.”

Victor Joseph, Tanana Chiefs Conference President, stated, “Our most honored citizens, our elders and our youth will be devastated by these cuts. Our seniors, who scrape by on fixed incomes, will suffer needlessly due to the elimination of the Senior Benefits Program. Most of them rely on this small amount to pay for food, gas, and prescriptions. Our children, our future leaders, see lifelong benefits from early education; the elimination of Head Start funding will negatively impact budget decisions for years to come.”

Lawmakers worked diligently to make substantial and well-reasoned cuts to the state operating budget. Their work was informed by overwhelming public participation in the budget process. The budget passed by the legislature contains the most significant cuts to essential services in decades, and comes on the heels of several years of reductions to government spending. In contrast, the vetoes run counter to Alaska’s values and cut dangerously deeper.

Here is a sampling of impacts of vetoes on Alaska Regional Coalition’s 65,000 Alaskan constituents:

Medicaid

The veto of \$50 million from the Medicaid budget, on top of the \$70 million in cuts approved by the legislature, threatens the health and wellbeing of Alaskans and will surely send the state’s economy back into recession, which will result in the loss of thousands of jobs. There has been inadequate explanation about how these cuts will be executed or who they will impact. Alaskans deserve to know how unallocated cuts to Medicaid will impact children, the disabled, the elderly, and rural hospitals. Complete elimination of adult preventative dental will result in untreated disease and more expensive trips to emergency rooms. This drastic economic change will surely send the state’s economy back into recession, resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs.

Senior Benefits / Early Childhood / Homelessness

- Senior Benefits Program cuts target over 11,000 of Alaska’s most financially challenged elders who rely on modest monthly stipends to make ends meet.
- Elimination of HeadStart, Parents as Teachers, Best Beginnings and other early childhood programs – not to mention reductions to child nutrition supports – undermine the health and wellbeing of Alaska’s children and jeopardizes Alaska’s future.
- Reducing funds for homelessness prevention programs remove a critical safety net and will result in more children and families on the streets. These cuts will make our communities less safe.

Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO)

There is a public safety crisis in rural Alaska. With 1 in 3 communities having no law enforcement, and others needing resources to retain officers, the Village Public Safety Officer program veto cannot stand. The legislature explicitly urged the Department of Public safety to fully disburse funding meant for VPSOs, rather than “lapse” that funding back to the general fund. VPSO funds can and should be utilized for recruitment and retention and other mission-critical activities – not cut. The concept of “lapse” funding is an anathema to supporters of rural public safety.

Community Assistance / Legal Supports

- Elimination of state Community Assistance, also known as Community Revenue Sharing, inhibits Alaskans’ ability to address local needs. The veto of Community Assistance shifts the burden onto local taxpayers or onto communities with no revenue base whatsoever.
- Vetoes to legal supports for low-income Alaskans and cuts to public defenders are antithetical to the concept of justice for all.

The legislature approved a budget that reflected the will of the people. Alaskans turned out in record numbers to participate in this year’s budget process. **The Alaska State Legislature should stand by its budget and reject the vetoes.**

Take Action: Three-quarters, or 45-out-of-60 legislators, must vote in agreement to overturn any vetoes by the end of the fifth day of special session – July 12 – less than two weeks away. Here are contacts for individual [House](#) and [Senate](#) members. To find your legislators, click [here](#) and scroll down to “Who Represents Me?” A list of all lawmakers’ email addresses can be downloaded [here](#).

For more information contact Natasha Singh, General Counsel, Tanana Chiefs Conference at 907-378-2103.

The Alaska Regional Coalition is a consortium of four Alaska Native regional nonprofits and one regional tribe – Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC); Kawerak, Inc.; Maniilaq Assn.; Chugachmiut; and Central Council Tlingit-Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA). We represent 100 communities and 65,000 Alaskans from Kotzebue to Ketchikan – that’s almost 1-in-10 Alaskans. We provide medical, behavioral, social, public safety, child welfare, workforce development, judicial supports, and other services pursuant to the federal Indian Self-Determination Act and a variety of grants contracts. We offer critical services on behalf of the State of Alaska in 100 communities. We provide services to all the people in our communities.