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Legislature passes bill expanding unemployment benefits for Alaskans impacted by COVID-19
HB308 is a critical step to provide much needed aid for those displaced by deadly virus

JUNEAU – Today, a bill that will make it easier for Alaskans facing economic impacts due to the outbreak of COVID-19 to access unemployment benefits cleared its final legislative hurdle.

[House Bill 308](#) passed the House of Representatives on a 37-0 vote, one day after it passed the Senate, 19-0. The bill, which now heads to the governor’s desk for final approval, is a critical step in the effort to provide much needed aid and comfort to Alaskans displaced by this deadly virus.

Rep. Ivy Spohnholz (D-Anchorage) is the House Labor and Commerce Committee chair and the bill’s prime sponsor. “We have seen a 700 percent increase in unemployment benefit applications over the last month as hard-working families are forced to lose work, hours, or pay because of the public health crisis around this disease,” **Representative Spohnholz** said. “Alaskans need help now, and this bill provides critical relief for these families.”

The bill allows Alaskans who have lost work, whether from being forced to stay at home and care for children displaced from school or childcare, or those who lost employment when their employer’s business closed, to apply for unemployment benefits from the State of Alaska. It also makes the state eligible to receive federal unemployment insurance grants authorized by the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#).

The bill waives the normal one-week waiting period and the requirement that those affected be ready and able to work, as many Alaskans will be forced to remain indoors. HB308 also removes the cap on the number of dependents cared for in the bill and increases the allowance for dependents from \$24 to \$75 per dependent per week.

Sen. Click Bishop (R-Fairbanks) sponsored the Senate companion bill, [SB240](#), and said, “Alaska workers have been paying into our unemployment insurance trust fund with every paycheck, and it is our duty to allow them to access those benefits they have paid for if they are unable to work due to the coronavirus outbreak.”

The speedy passage of this bill – from its introduction on March 18 to a final floor vote on March 23 – represents true bipartisan effort to respond to a crisis. This would not have been possible without support of leadership in all bodies, and the sponsors thank all legislators and the Department of Labor for their support.

If you have been affected by COVID-19 closures and lost work, you can access the State Unemployment Insurance Program online at my.alaska.gov. Once on the homepage, click on “Unemployment Insurance Benefits.” Depending on your location, you can also call for assistance: Anchorage residents (907-269-4700), Fairbanks residents (907-451-2871), Juneau residents (907-465-5552), and people who live anywhere else in Alaska (1-888-252-2557).

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