



Greater Ketchikan Chamber of Commerce

2417 Tongass Ave., Ste. 223A
Ketchikan, AK 99901

April 16, 2025

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Chamber Staff

Michelle O'Brien

Executive Director
In House
Southern Southeast Alaska
Building Industry Association

Dear Legislators,

On behalf of the Greater Ketchikan Chamber of Commerce and the Southern Southeast Alaska Building Industry Association and our members, we write to express our strong support for House Bill 161. ***This legislation represents a balanced and thoughtful approach to employee leave that respects the realities faced by small businesses across Alaska, particularly those in rural and seasonal economies like ours.***

HB 161 Supports Small Businesses

By exempting employers with fewer than 50 employees from the paid sick leave mandate, HB 161 recognizes the significant burden universal compliance could impose on our small business community. Many of our members operate with limited staff and tight margins, and this exemption is essential for their continued success and growth.

It Reflects Alaska's Seasonal Work Realities

Alaska's economy is unique, with many businesses—especially in tourism, fishing, and hospitality—operating seasonally. HB 161 acknowledges this by exempting seasonal employers whose operations peak for six months or less, offering a realistic and appropriate solution for our regional workforce.

It Clarifies and Improves Sick Leave Policy

HB 161 introduces clearer definitions regarding what qualifies as paid sick leave, helping reduce confusion and ensuring consistent implementation for both employers and employees.

It Allows Flexibility

The bill's provision allowing employees to cash out unused sick leave adds a layer of flexibility that empowers both employers and workers. This promotes fairness and provides a benefit to employees without imposing undue hardship on businesses.

It Offers a Better Alternative to Ballot Measure 1

HB 161 responds with a more balanced and business-friendly approach—one that still encourages strong leave policies but respects Alaska's diversity in business size and structure.

It Encourages Voluntary Compliance and Protects Jobs

Rather than imposing rigid mandates, HB 161 promotes voluntary compliance, helping to prevent the unintended consequences of job loss, reduced hours, or delayed hiring—especially critical as many of our industries continue to recover from economic disruptions.

It Acknowledges the Challenges of Rural Alaska

Implementing uniform mandates across Alaska's geographically and economically diverse communities can be impractical and burdensome. HB 161 takes these challenges into account, helping to preserve the viability of small businesses in remote regions like Ketchikan. HB 161 strikes a crucial balance—supporting fair employee practices while protecting the vitality of Alaska's small business community. **We urge you to support this important legislation, and we thank you for your continued efforts to foster an environment in which both businesses and employees can thrive.**

Sincerely,

Michelle O'Brien, Executive Director,

Greater Ketchikan Chamber of Commerce

Southern Southeast Alaska Building Industry Association