

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

SENATOR
GARY STEVENS
Chair, Emergency Preparedness Committee
Sen.Gary.Stevens@akleg.gov
907-465-4451

SENATOR
CATHY GIESSEL
Senate President
Sen.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov
907-465-4843

REPRESENTATIVE
BRYCE EDGMON
Speaker of the House
Rep.Bryce.Edgmon@akleg.gov
907-465-4451

SENATOR
TOM BEGICH
Minority Leader
Sen.Tom.Begich@akleg.gov
907-465-3704

REPRESENTATIVE
LANCE PRUITT
House Minority Leader
Rep.Lance.Pruitt@akleg.gov
907-465-3438

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 13, 2020

Alaska Legislature announces initial actions to limit spread of COVID-19
Access to State Capitol limited to lawmakers, staff, and journalists

JUNEAU – In response to the arrival of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 in Alaska, the Legislature today adopted a series of initial actions recommended by the newly formed Legislative Council Subcommittee on Emergency Response and Preparedness.

Effective immediately, access to the State Capitol will be limited to lawmakers, employees of the Legislature, members of the governor’s administration, and credentialed journalists. Legislative work will continue as normal, and Alaskans will be able to participate fully in the public process by following along on [Gavel Alaska](#), [AKL.tv](#), and through written and telephonic testimony.

The Legislature also enacted a temporary ban on state-sponsored travel by lawmakers and legislative employees. Additionally, anyone with access to the Capitol who travels out-of-state on personal business will be advised not to re-enter the building for at least seven days upon returning.

Members of the subcommittee also established protocols for what will occur if someone with access to the Capitol tests positive for COVID-19, which will be guided by advice from the Department of Health and Social Services and the Centers for Disease Control.

These unprecedented steps are temporary but necessary to protect the health and safety of Alaskans and ensure the Legislature is able to finalize budgets and other important matters.

“To protect Alaskans and ensure the people’s business continues in a timely and transparent manner, the Legislature has acted to limit the spread of the virus,” said **Sen. Gary Stevens** (R-Kodiak), chair of the Legislative Council Subcommittee on Emergency Response and Preparedness. “After several lengthy discussions, and in accordance with CDC guidelines, we will reduce interpersonal contact in the Capitol to limit exposure to the new coronavirus.”

“Alaskans elected us to lead, and that’s what we’re doing,” **House Speaker Bryce Edgmon** (I-Dillingham) said. “We’re committed to continuing our legislative work, which includes making sure healthcare workers have the tools they need to slow the spread of COVID-19. We will work closely with our local and federal partners to monitor the progress of this disease and to make sure supply chains continue to provide essential goods to communities across our state. The session will continue to broadcast on [Gavel Alaska](#) and [AKL.tv](#) so the public is up to date on our work to keep Alaskans safe.”

“The Alaska Legislature has always been a leader and innovator in technology that allows Alaskans to participate remotely in public meetings,” **House Minority Leader Lance Pruitt** (R-Anchorage) said. “We will complete the process we have begun in a manner that allows maximum public participation while following CDC guidelines.”

“The most important thing for Alaskans to know is that the state continues take a proactive, forward-thinking approach,” said **Senate Minority Leader Tom Begich** (D-Anchorage). “These actions are taken through an abundance of caution to prevent an uncontrolled spread of the virus. All Alaskans should be united in a common and cautious approach to public health.”

“A few precautionary steps will help mitigate the spread of this disease,” **Senate President Cathy Giessel** (R-Anchorage) said. “We want to reduce the strain on our healthcare facilities to ensure our most vulnerable Alaskans receive the care they need, and continue the important work of passing a balanced budget for the people of Alaska.”

The Alaska Legislature urges Alaskans to regularly visit the Department of Health and Social Services [website](#) for up-to-date information about COVID-19. It’s important to remember that washing your hands, social distancing, and not touching your face are simple practices that can help reduce the spread of this virus.

Earlier this week, with overwhelming support, the House and Senate expedited the passage of a mental health budget that [approves \\$13.1 million in emergency coronavirus federal and state funding](#). Lawmakers also passed [House Bill 29](#), a bill that [expands access to telehealth](#) which is an important tool to protect the health of Alaskans as our medical system responds to the new coronavirus.