

Alaska Education Update

Tracking Legislative Information

January, 2023

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Legislative Information Sources

BASIS: akleg.gov

The [homepage](#) of the legislature’s site has tabs at the top for floor calendars and committee hearings (“Daily Schedule”), among other things.



Tracking Legislation in BASIS

One of the tabs on the left-hand side of BASIS is [BILLS & LAWS](#), which has links to legislation, committees, hearings, and many ways to sort and find information on legislation. Some links in BILLS & LAWS are:

- [Actions by Date](#) – All floor action on all legislation for any one date, including committee reports, floor votes, and when legislators cosponsor a bill.
- [Committees/Bills in Committee](#) – Links to committees; you can find information on committee members, hearings, legislation that has been referred to, and legislation that has been sponsored by committees.
- [Sponsor Summary](#) – All legislation sponsored by a particular legislator or committee, for example all legislation that Sen. Stevens has sponsored, or all legislation that the Senate Rules Committee has sponsored. Legislation from the governor is always sponsored by the Rules Committees.
- [Subject Summary](#) – All legislation under a particular subject, for example, all education-related legislation.
- [Bill Tracking Management Facility](#) (BTMF) – Allows a user to set up an account and choose bills to receive email notification of action on, including being scheduled for a hearing or a floor vote. It's very helpful if you're tracking a particular bill and don't want to keep checking BASIS.

For BTMF, and anywhere in BASIS, actually, you do not need to capitalize or use any spaces. For instance, you do not need to type HB 5, but can simply type hb5.

Status of Legislation – The best way to find the status of a particular bill is to look the bill up in BASIS. On every page on the legislature's website is a search field where you can enter a bill number (once again, no need to capitalize or use spaces). Once you pull up the bill, scroll down and click on the link on the right-hand side of the page to "Display Committee Action with Bill History," and it will show all the hearings a bill has had. For more information on a bill, there are six tabs just above the link to display committee action:

- **Actions** – Floor actions and committee hearings a bill has had
- **Full Text** – Every version of the bill that has been read across on the floor (does not include proposed committee substitutes that have been heard in committee meetings but have not yet been read on the floor)
- **Fiscal Notes** – All fiscal notes that have been read across on the floor (does not include fiscal notes that have been discussed in committee meetings but have not yet been read on the floor)
- **Amendments** – All amendments as they are offered on the floor (does not include amendments offered in committee meetings)
- **Minutes and Audio** – All minutes, audio, and video of hearings

- **Documents** – All documents associated with a bill that a committee aide has posted in BASIS. This is where you will find sponsor statements, sectional analyses, written testimony that has been submitted to the committee, background documents, and proposed committee substitutes and fiscal notes that have not yet been read across on the floor. Once in a while items will be discussed in committee meetings that the committee aide has neglected to post in BASIS. That is unfortunate, but it does happen sometimes. In that case the only way you can get access to a document is if you can get the committee aide or the person providing it to the committee to email it to you.

An example of how a bill looks in BASIS:

BILL	SB 20	BILL
CURRENT STATUS	(S) EDC	VERSION
	Then FIN	
STATUS DATE	01/22/2021	SHORT TITLE OUT OF STATE TEACHER RECIPROCITY
SPONSOR(S)	SENATOR STEVENS	
TITLE	"An Act relating to recognition of certificates of out-of-state teachers."	

Bill Number: [Search Bill](#) [Next Bill](#) [Sponsor Statement](#)

Actions	Full Text	Fiscal Notes	Amendments	Minutes and Audio	Documents
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[Hide Committee Actions](#)

Jrn Date	Jrn Page	Text
1/8/2021	39	(S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
1/22/2021	39	(S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
1/22/2021	39	(S) EDC, FIN
1/22/2021	39	(S) REFERRED TO EDUCATION

[Similar Subject Match](#) or [Exact Subject Match](#)
[EDUCATION](#)
[LICENSING](#)
[SCHOOL DISTRICTS](#)
[SCHOOLS](#)
[TEACHERS](#)

Publications – On the left side of BASIS is the [Publications Tab](#), which is a page that has links to various publications, including:

- Directory of State Officials
- Alaska Constitution
- Citizen’s Guide to the Constitution
- Uniform Rules
- Constitutional Convention Files
- Executive Orders

- Administrative Codes, Regulations, & Alaska Statutes (You can also enter a statute number in the search field in BASIS, the same place you would enter a bill number, and pull up statutes that way.)
- Legislator and staff contact lists
- Handbook on Alaska State Government
- Guides to the budget process and the legislative process
- Many other publications

Text Message Notifications - You can also receive notification of action on legislation through text message. To receive text message updates, text a bill number to **559-245-2529**. You do not need to capitalize or use any spaces. For instance, you do not need to text HB 5, but can simply text hb5. (The number is not working as of January 11, 2023, but I've been told it will be working soon.)

Legislative Information Offices – In addition to handling all teleconferences, Legislative Information Office staff are there to help people find information, including helping you find your way around BASIS. The eighth tab down on the left in BASIS will take you to [a list of Legislative Information Offices](#). From there, you can click on a specific LIO and get information on the location, phone number, email address, office hours, parking information, and legislators for that office. You can call the Juneau LIO (the main Legislative Information Office) at 907-465-4648.

Gavel to Gavel

Gavel to Gavel is an independent source for audio and video of legislative hearings, floor sessions, and press conferences. Audio and video of legislative hearings are available in BASIS, but Gavel to Gavel is the only source for audio and video of floor sessions and press conferences. Gavel to Gavel homepage: ktoo.org/gavel/

House & Senate Majority & Minority Press Releases

The House and Senate Majorities and Minorities all have press officers, and they are a good source for current legislative news via their press releases. They send out announcements when legislation is introduced or passed, on press conferences, and sometimes when legislation is scheduled for a hearing or moved from committee.

To contact press officers or to get on email distribution lists, scroll down to the bottom of any page on BASIS and on the right are links to caucus websites.

Individual Legislator Newsletters

Many legislators send out newsletters regularly. You may want to subscribe to your own legislators' newsletters. To access a legislator's newsletter, go to the page of the caucus they belong to and click on a legislator's name to view and subscribe to their newsletters. This function may not be available for all legislators.

Social Media

Twitter is the most useful social media platform for tracking up-to-the-minute legislative information. Journalists often tweet during hearings, press conferences, and floor sessions, and many legislative staff and legislators also tweet regularly. Twitter is a hot mess right now, and I don't know if it will remain reliable, but so far it is still active for legislative news.

One way to follow specific topics on Twitter is to use hashtags (#). The hashtag for following the Alaska State Legislature is [#akleg](#). You can also subscribe to curated lists that people put together. I've put together a list of legislators, staff, and legislative reporters, which aggregates all tweets from the people on the list. Here's [a link](#) to my Alaska State Legislature Twitter list.

The nice thing about Twitter is it's what's known as a microblogging platform. Posts are limited to 280 characters, which means you can scroll through all the [#akleg](#) tweets and get up to speed with what's going on very quickly.

The Budget Process

The Legislative Finance Division's [Swiss Army Knife](#) is the definitive guide to the legislature's budget process.

Any legislation with a fiscal impact, including the governor's proposed operating and capital budgets, is referred to the finance committees. The finance committees are the last committee of referral for legislation. This means that if legislation has committee referrals in addition to finance, it goes to those committees first. Bills that are solely budget bills are referred only to the finance committees.

Although the governor's budgets are introduced concurrently in both the house and the senate, it has historically been the house version of the operating and mental health budgets, and the senate version of the capital budget that are passed. However, beginning with Covid in 2020, the budgets have all been rolled into one bill.

The finance subcommittees review the governor's operating budget requests for each state agency and then make a report to the full finance committee with changes they have made to the governor's budget requests. The finance committees then usually accept the recommendations of the subcommittees, but will sometimes change some items. Eventually, a version of each budget will make it to the floor of the house and the senate, where additional amendments may be made. The House Education Committee does not have any jurisdiction over the base student allocation, but just the budget for the Dept. of Education & Early Development.

The house and senate pass different versions of the budget. The legislation then goes to a conference committee to negotiate a final bill. The conference committee will put together their own committee substitute when the members come to agreement on all the items in the budget. The house and the senate then vote to adopt the conference committee substitute. Once the house and senate pass the same version of a budget, it is sent to the governor, who then has the option to make partial or total line item vetoes.

The 24-Hour Rule

When the operating budget passes in the senate, it will be returned to the house for concurrence (a fancy way for the senate to say, “We know you will just love what we did with this thing and vote to accept our changes”). I can guarantee you the house will not concur with the senate amendments to the bill.

The house will then send the bill back to the senate, asking them to recede from their amendments (a fancy way for the house to say, “No thank you, we like our bill better; vote for our bill”). I can guarantee you that will not happen either.

At that point, a conference committee consisting of three members of the House Finance Committee and three members of the Senate Finance Committee will be appointed. The conference committee has always consisted of the co-chairs of each committee and a minority member of each committee. However, there are no minority members on the Senate Finance Committee this year.

Once the conference committee for the operating budget is appointed, under [Uniform Rule 23 \(d\)](#) committee chairs are only required to give 24-hour notice to hear a bill. That is the 24-hour Rule, and things speed up considerably at that point. In fact, “24-Hour Rule” is somewhat of a misnomer, as notice is just given a calendar day before the hearing, which is often less than 24 hours.

Even without the 24-Hour Rule in place, bills that have already been heard in committee or that have previously been scheduled for a hearing, even if they weren’t taken up, can be taken up at any point in the future under “Bills previously heard/scheduled.” Toward the end of session things move really fast, and often members of the public and the press don’t hear about a piece of legislation being heard in committee until after the fact.

This is where Twitter really comes in handy, as there is almost always someone who will tweet when a bill is added to a committee’s schedule on short notice, such as under the 24-Hour Rule or when a bill is brought up again under “Bills previously heard/scheduled.”