

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 14

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY REPRESENTATIVES JOSEPHSON, Fields, Sumner

Introduced: 2/20/24

Referred: Education, Judiciary

A RESOLUTION

1 **Supporting the creation of a school of law within the University of Alaska.**

2 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

3 **WHEREAS** Alaska is the only state in the United States that does not have a law
4 school; and

5 **WHEREAS** the state has a unique legal landscape that includes disputes around
6 extracting resources, commercial and recreational fishing, tribal sovereignty, and subsistence
7 rights; and

8 **WHEREAS** a 10-year analysis recently published in the Alaska Business magazine
9 showed a 240 percent increase in the number of retired attorneys in the state, as well as an
10 increase in the number of attorneys practicing in the state who are located outside of the state;
11 and

12 **WHEREAS** the state has a particular need for attorneys with knowledge of the state's
13 unique legal landscape, particularly in rural areas of the state and among underserved
14 populations; and

15 **WHEREAS** 35 percent of the state's population is Black, Indigenous, and People of
16 Color (BIPOC), yet only six percent of attorneys practicing in the state are BIPOC; and

1 **WHEREAS**, on June 8, 2020, the Alaska Supreme Court released a statement reading
2 "We recognize that too often African-Americans, Alaska Natives, and other people of color
3 are not treated with the same dignity and respect as white members of our communities" and
4 "We must also work to attract more people of color to the practice of law and, ultimately, to
5 judicial careers"; and

6 **WHEREAS** nine percent of sitting judges in the state are BIPOC; and

7 **WHEREAS**, when BIPOC attorneys have applied for judgeships, they have been
8 nominated for selection by the Alaska Judicial Council at similar rates to nomination of non-
9 BIPOC applicants; and

10 **WHEREAS** the Alaska Judicial Council has adopted a bylaw stating, "The Council
11 shall actively encourage qualified members of the bar to seek nomination to such offices,
12 making every effort to promote diversity, including gender and ethnic diversity, and shall
13 strive to inform the public of Alaska's judicial and public defender selection process"; and

14 **WHEREAS**, in 2018, members of the Alaska Federation of Natives, by way of a
15 resolution, called on the Alaska Judicial Council to conduct a study of charging and
16 sentencing disparities in cases involving non-Native offenders and Native victims in
17 comparison to Native offenders and non-Native victims; and

18 **WHEREAS** the 2010 report of the American Bar Association on diversity in the legal
19 profession concluded, "The overarching message is that a diverse legal profession is more
20 just, productive and intelligent because diversity, both cognitive and cultural, often leads to
21 better questions, analysis, solutions, and processes"; and

22 **WHEREAS**, in May of 2021, the Board of Governors of the Alaska Bar Association
23 approved a Diversity Initiative Resolution that created the Diversity Commission to
24 investigate the lack of diversity in the membership of the Alaska Bar Association with the
25 goal of increasing the number of BIPOC attorney members in the Alaska Bar Association;
26 and

27 **WHEREAS** the Diversity Commission surveyed members of the Alaska Bar
28 Association, and members surveyed responded that representation matters, that the
29 membership of both the makeup of judges and attorneys should resemble the communities the
30 members serve to offer differing perspectives and promote trust and confidence in the justice
31 system, and that racial and ethnic diversity is either important or very important to the

1 profession of law; and

2 **WHEREAS**, one respondent to the survey noted, "There is no law school in Alaska,
3 greatly increasing the cost of attending law school, meaning few Alaskans will attend law
4 school and return to practice in Alaska"; and

5 **WHEREAS** the Diversity Commission report identified the lack of a law school in
6 the state as a systemic barrier to diversification and concluded that creating a well-funded law
7 school accredited by the American Bar Association or a law school partnership with an
8 existing law school is a first step to increasing the diversity of the membership of the Alaska
9 Bar Association; and

10 **WHEREAS**, during a House Finance Subcommittee meeting on February 9, 2024,
11 representatives from the Department of Administration reported that the legal field is
12 experiencing recruitment challenges, including challenges recruiting legal interns because of
13 the state's lack of a law school; and

14 **WHEREAS** the Willamette University College of Law has a Direct Admission
15 Program for students at the University of Alaska Anchorage, the University of Alaska
16 Fairbanks, and the University of Alaska Southeast in which a student completes four years of
17 undergraduate work at one of the Alaska universities and, if certain conditions are met, the
18 student gains guaranteed admission to Willamette Law for three years of law school; and

19 **WHEREAS** the Mitchell Hamline School of Law has a Direct Admission Program for
20 students at the University of Alaska Anchorage, in which a student completes four years of
21 undergraduate work at University of Alaska Anchorage and, if certain conditions are met, the
22 student gains guaranteed admission to Mitchell Hamline School of Law for three years of law
23 school, which includes a blended learning model that allows students to complete most of
24 their coursework remotely while in the state; and

25 **WHEREAS** Alaska Pacific University has signed an agreement with Seattle
26 University to offer an MBA-JD dual degree in which a student completes a Master of
27 Business Administration in Anchorage and a Juris Doctor degree in Anchorage and Seattle;
28 and

29 **WHEREAS** the University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center has proposed a
30 University of Alaska Anchorage Law School and has developed a concept proposal that
31 would enable the legal education of a student to be tailored for the state's legal and economic

1 development needs;

2 **BE IT RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the University of Alaska
3 Anchorage to undertake a feasibility study of the University of Alaska Anchorage Law School
4 concept proposal; and be it

5 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the University of
6 Alaska Anchorage to initiate a law school partnership with an existing law school accredited
7 by the American Bar Association that would offer remote student learning opportunities
8 paired with one-week or two-week campus visits during the semester; and be it

9 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the University of
10 Alaska Anchorage to use a law school partnership as an opportunity to expand into a small,
11 financially sustainable law school that would enable students to complete law school while
12 living in the state.