

ANALYSIS OF HB249/SB207

House Bill 249 was introduced on January 16, 2024 by Representative Groh and a Senate bill companion (SB 207) was introduced on January 26, 2024 by Senator Kawasaki, with co-sponsors Senators Tobin, Bjorkman, Gray-Jackson, and Dunbar signing on to the bill on January 31. These bills provide direction for the creation of a 'military and veteran family help desk' within the Alaska Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs, effective immediately.

One of AFPC's policy priorities is to support efforts that improve food security for our active military and veterans. A 2022 Department of Defense study estimates that nationally, 24% of active military members are [food insecure](#). From a 2021 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) [report](#):

"In a recent survey of veterans, 27 percent reported experiencing challenges since their return to civilian life (Morin, 2011). This rate increased to 44 percent for veterans who served after September 11, 2001 (Morin, 2011). However, only 7 percent of veterans (1.3 million) are estimated to have participated in the USDA's largest food and nutrition assistance program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program), between 2016 and 2018 (Keith-Jennings and Cai, 2020)."

Understanding the critical challenges facing SNAP in Alaska, and the ongoing efforts to provide food access for Alaska's military and veteran populations, we believe the proposed family help desk will benefit our veteran and active military families. Below we provide considerations and recommendations for HB249/SB207 on behalf of the Alaska Food Policy Council.

Issue:

Too many active military and veterans in Alaska face food insecurity

Organizations like the Armed Services YMCA of Alaska and the Food Bank of Alaska, in addition to others, provide much needed food access services to active military and veteran families in Alaska. The proposed help desk should ensure that food security is in the list of top priorities for improving assistance to our active military and veteran families.

Recommendation:

Amend Section 1, 44.35.025(b)(5) to read: (5) in coordination with military installations, the United States Department of Defense, municipalities, and other departments of the state, provide recommendations to the department for improving assistance to military members, veterans, and their families relating to issues including workforce development, employment, physical and behavioral health, education, **food security**, and access to child care;

1 - Office of the Under Secretary for Personnel & Readiness, U.S. Department of Defense. "Strengthening Food Security in the Force: Strategy and Roadmap." July 2022.
<https://media.defense.gov/2022/Jul/14/2003035423/-1/-1/1/STRENGTHENING-FOOD-SECURITY-IN-THE-FORCE-STRATEGY-AND-ROADMAP.PDF>.

2- Rabbitt, Matthew P. and Michael D. Smith May 2021. Food Insecurity Among Working-Age Veterans, ERR-829, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/101269/err-829.pdf?v=4626.9>

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