



# Alaska State Legislature

## Senator Matt Claman

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*Serving West Anchorage*

### March 2023 Community Council Update

**Start of Session Newsletter and Constituent Survey** — One of the most important components of my work as your Senator is hearing about what matters to you. Each household will receive our newsletter and survey in the mail. You can complete the survey by hand or online:

<https://forms.gle/MXPs9eWJdVvLzyoN6>.

**The online survey will remain open until March 13.** Please take a moment to share your thoughts!

**Mid-Session Constituent Meeting** — Please join Representative Armstrong, Representative McKay, and me for pizza, beverages, and an opportunity to discuss the legislative session. I look forward to seeing you! For more information and to RSVP, visit: <https://www.facebook.com/SenMattClaman/events>.

**When:** Saturday, March 25<sup>th</sup> from noon to 1:30 PM

**Where:** Anchorage Legislative Information Office (LIO), 1500 W Benson Blvd.

**Department Employee Shortages & Importance of Defined Benefit** — Essential state services continue to be impacted by labor shortages. Our office continues to hear from constituents who have not received food stamps for months. A [KTOO article](#) interviewed two workers in the Division of Public Assistance who explained that chronic understaffing is the cause of the backlog.

Food stamp programs should be reliable and consistent. As we learn more about how vacancies, retention, and recruitment issues are impacting the experiences of members of our community and state workers, we are considering how the legislature can help. For programs like food stamps, adequate funding and staffing is key to success. The food stamp program also uses an antiquated computer system that needs to be modernized. We understand that through the budget, we can ensure proper funding for state services. And through legislation, we can return the State of Alaska to a competitive retirement system that will assist departments in recruiting and retaining staff.

In 2006, the legislature ended the state's pension retirement plan and replaced state retirement plans with a 401(k) style plan that is subject to the volatility of the stock market. This year, there are several proposals that address the public retirement system. [House Bill 22/Senate Bill 35](#) are companion pieces of legislation that return public safety officers to a pension retirement plan. [Senate Bill 11](#) returns the state to the Tier 3 pension retirement structure.

An important consideration is how Alaska competes with other states in the retirement plan we offer public employees. Currently, Alaska is the only state that does not offer a pension to public employees. With lower salaries than some states in the Northwest and a weaker retirement plan, Alaska is having difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified employees. This challenge is highlighted by UA's capacity to graduate 200 certified teachers every year while the Anchorage School District currently loses more than 200 teachers every year. We lack the capacity to fill teacher openings in Anchorage, and we're competing with other states and school districts when we recruit in the Lower 48.