ASHSC Alaska Seismic Hazards Safety Commission

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 2026-2
STATEWIDE IDENTIFICATION AND MITIGATION OF SEISMICALLY VULNERABLE PUBLIC BUILDINGS

The Alaska Seismic Hazards Safety Commission recommends that the State establish and maintain a formal, statewide program to identify, prioritize, and mitigate seismic risks in public buildings, with emphasis on life safety, post-earthquake functionality, and emergency shelter capability.

DISCUSSION

Alaska is the most seismically active state in the nation yet it lacks a coordinated and sustained program to evaluate the vulnerability of existing public buildings to earthquake hazards. Many state-owned and publicly occupied facilities, including schools and community shelters, were constructed prior to modern seismic codes and may be vulnerable to strong ground shaking, ground failure, landslides, or tsunami inundation.

These facilities are presumed safe by the public and are often relied upon during disasters as gathering places or evacuation shelters. Failure to systematically assess and address their seismic vulnerability presents avoidable life-safety and continuity of operations risks.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The Commission recommends that the Legislature direct and support a program that:

1. **Implements standardized seismic screening of public buildings** using nationally accepted methodologies (e.g., FEMA Rapid Visual Screening[1], ASCE/SEI Tier I evaluations[2]), including evaluation of structural, nonstructural, and site-related hazards. These screenings could likely be completed with little cost, effort, or time but provide valuable insights.
2. **Prioritizes buildings for mitigation or replacement** based on seismic hazard exposure, occupancy, building age and type, emergency function, and potential use as post-disaster shelters.
3. **Uses screening results to guide capital planning and funding decisions**, ensuring limited resources are directed toward facilities presenting the greatest life-safety risk.

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[1] Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Rapid Visual Screening of Buildings for Potential Seismic Hazards: A handbook. (FEMA 154 or P154)

[2] American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). Seismic Evaluation and Retrofit of Existing Buildings. (ASCE/SEI 41-23)

4. **Coordinates efforts across state agencies and local governments**, allowing existing evaluations to be incorporated where available and reducing redundant assessments.
5. **Provide or acquire funding to mitigate any deficiencies in public buildings used as evacuation centers** by using the State Capital budget with State or Federal dollars.

This approach provides a cost-effective, defensible framework for improving public safety while supporting long-term resilience and emergency preparedness.

HISTORY

PR 2026-2 was approved unanimously on October 15, 2026 and supersedes PRs 2011-3 and 2015-3.