

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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State Capitol, Rm. 418
Juneau, AK 99801

INTERIM:
1500 W. Benson Blvd
Anchorage, AK 99503



House Energy Committee,
Co-Chair

Community and Regional
Affairs Committee

State Affairs Committee

Joined Armed Services
Committee

REPRESENTATIVE KY HOLLAND

HB 346 Version A (34-LS1497\N) Sponsor Statement

Airports are critical infrastructure in Alaska, facilitating commerce and ensuring access to basic needs for rural communities. At the same time, many airports exist in close proximity to residential neighborhoods, where thoughtful planning and responsible land management are essential to ensure that aviation activity remains compatible with surrounding communities. Vegetative buffers and similar land-use protections are commonly used to reduce noise, maintain safety margins, and preserve quality of life for nearby residents. These buffers can also serve as visual screening, environmental protection, and a transition between industrial aviation uses and residential neighborhoods.

Buffer zones are largely designated by local planning and zoning ordinances, and the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities is generally required to comply with these local plans. However, the statutes governing state airports have been interpreted as an exception: currently, the Department is not required to comply with local planning and zoning ordinances when developing airport land. As a result, questions have arisen about how local buffer requirements should be considered when airport property is developed.

House Bill 346 addresses this statutory ambiguity by clarifying that the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, when exercising its authority over airport land, must comply with local zoning and planning ordinances that require buffers between airports and adjacent nonindustrial property. The legislation still allows DOT&PF to reduce or remove a buffer when it determines that doing so is necessary to address a direct aviation safety hazard. In those cases, the department must provide public notice and an opportunity for comment and must implement mitigation measures to minimize the impacts of any buffer reduction whenever possible.

Federal Aviation Administration regulations appropriately govern many aspects of airport safety and operations. However, HB 346 addresses discretionary development decisions on airport land that are not mandated by federal safety standards and ensures that those decisions remain consistent with local planning and community buffer protections.

HB 346 does not override the state's responsibility to ensure safe airport operations. Instead, the bill ensures that state airport management works in partnership with local planning processes that are already in place. By requiring coordination with local zoning and planning standards, HB 346 helps airport development proceed in a way that respects both aviation needs and the communities that live alongside these facilities.

March 4th, 2026