

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI

Sponsor Statement Senate Bill 210

An Act relating to the misrepresentation of seafood and seafood ingredients by retail food establishments

Senate Bill 210 would prohibit Alaska restaurants from misrepresenting the identity and origin of seafood on their menus. Restaurants misidentifying seafood products will be subject to a fine of \$500 for each violation. SB 210 also permits restaurant employees to report complaints anonymously and without being subject to retaliation from their employer.

It is particularly easy to deceive consumers about seafood at restaurants because of the many species of fish and other seafood available for substitution and due to diners' limited familiarity with them. Investigations across the nation into restaurants misrepresenting seafood on their menus demonstrate that the problem is rampant. For example a 2015 national study by Oceana, a non-profit organization supporting ocean abundance and biodiversity, indicated that 43% of salmon samples tested were mislabeled. That study also shows that restaurant diners received mislabeled seafood products 38% of the time—five times the rate of mislabeling in grocery stores.

The risk of misleading restaurant customers about seafood menu items is too great for Alaska. Passing this bill will protect consumers and safeguard our world-class seafood industry. Misrepresenting Alaska seafood—providing an inferior product—diminishes the reputation of our seafood among consumers. Restaurant customers expecting quality Alaskan seafood but receiving a lower-value substitute experience disappointment and may not choose Alaskan seafood in the future. Misrepresentation of Alaskan seafood also directly hurts our renowned seafood industry. A restaurant advertising premium Alaskan seafood but willfully substituting a lower-quality product enjoys the benefit of the Alaska label without the cost investment and undermines our state's industry by lessening demands on our seafood market. Alaska's fisheries bring tens of thousands of jobs to the state and have a significant economic impact throughout coastal Alaska, rural Alaska, and urban Alaska. We should afford protections to this industry against the possibility of menu misrepresentation.

A majority of Alaska's seafood restaurants are outstanding providers of our exceptional seafood. This legislation will simply provide further assurances that all restaurants in the state are honestly representing the identity and origin of their seafood.