



Senator Scott Jiu Wo Kawasaki

Alaska State Senate

Senate Bill 167 Sponsor Statement

An Act relating to a permanent fund dividend for an individual whose conviction has been vacated or reversed and dismissed or overturned via retrial; and relating to the calculation of the value of the Permanent Fund Dividend by including payment to individuals eligible for a Permanent Fund Dividend because of a conviction that has been vacated or reversed and dismissed or overturned via retrial.

The State of Alaska Department of Law Criminal Division's mission is to "assure safe and healthy communities by prosecuting and convicting criminal offenders throughout Alaska." Likewise, the State has a responsibility to ensure that those convicted of crimes are prosecuted fairly and justly. If the State finds an offender was wrongfully convicted, the State should do right by those who have had their convictions overturned.

Incarcerated Alaskans relinquish their Permanent Fund Dividends to the State. SB 167 seeks to pay PFDs to Alaskans whose convictions were vacated or reversed and dismissed, provided that a dismissal was not obtained through a rule 11 plea agreement in another criminal case. If passed, those eligible must apply for the PFD within 1 year following the new judgment or within 1 year of the effective date of the bill. Alaska is currently one of just 12 states that provide no compensation for wrongful conviction. Many states provide monetary compensation as well as college tuition and job training to their exonerees.

Providing the PFD to those Alaskans who lost this privilege because of a wrongful conviction is one of the few things the State of Alaska can do to help them reestablish a normal life by providing a means to find housing, food and education. The transition back to civilian life for these individuals can be difficult due to the loss of time with loved ones, as well as the loss of income otherwise earned. While we are not able to return the experiences and opportunities missed from wrongful incarceration, we should at least be able to reimburse our exonerees the PFD money that rightfully belongs to them.

In 2017, the same bill passed the House with overwhelming bipartisan support and a vote of 38-1. I ask your support for this bill, which would help victims of injustice with their transition back into society as the State looks to ensure justice and fairness for all Alaskans.