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Senate Bill 151 School District Head Lice and Pink Eye Policy

Version O Sponsor Statement

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The goal of Senate Bill 151 is to prevent lice and pink eye from being spread in Alaska's schools.

Unfortunately, it has become the practice of some schools to allow students with lice and bacterial conjunctivitis (pink eye) to remain at school where they spread lice and pink eye to other kids and bring them home to infest or infect the rest of the family. Most parents are shocked to learn that is happening. Parents are incensed that they are not being notified about cases of lice or pink eye in their students' classrooms.

When a child gets lice, it creates an immense amount of work for parents to treat their child's hair and the surfaces in their home where lice can live. This extra work and stress on families is preventable if students don't spread lice. Similarly, pink eye is extremely contagious and can be much more harmful than lice. Pink eye can lead to severe eye irritation, ulcers on the eye and even loss of vision.

SB 151 instructs districts to adopt policies directing the course of action when a student is found to have lice or pink eye. If districts do not adopt a policy within 180 days of the effective date of the bill, then the policy in the bill applies. The purposed statutory policy is that when a student is found to have lice, they should go home at the end of the school day and not return until they no longer have live lice. If a student has pink eye, they need to leave class immediately and may return to school 24 hours after they have begun antibiotic treatment. Also, parents/guardians will be notified of cases of lice and pink eye that occur in their student's classroom in a manner that respects all students' privacy.

This local option allows school districts to adopt a policy that is right for them. If no action is taken, then parents can rely on this backstop in state law to help stop the spread of lice and pink eye at school.

I urge members' support of this commonsense hygiene measure.