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Senator Kevin Meyer Senate District L

SPONSOR STATEMENT SENATE BILL 39

It is essential for the dignity and humanity of people with intellectual disabilities that we, as a society, use respectful and inclusive language. Although “mental retardation” was originally a clinical term introduced with good intentions, it has transformed into a term used widely in our society to degrade and insult people with intellectual disabilities. Unfortunately, even in our modern world much of society does not recognize the hurtful, dehumanizing and exclusive effects of the word “retard(ed).”

Senate Bill 39 seeks to update state health, education and labor policy by removing the terms “mental retardation” and “mentally retarded,” and replace them with “intellectual and developmental disabilities.” These changes will provide more respectful and inclusive language in our state statutes, while neither expanding nor diminishing services, rights, responsibilities or educational opportunities for individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. These changes will also make our state statutes consistent with language in federal law, Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organization, and the White House through the President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities.

The implementation of Senate Bill 39 will add Alaska to the more than 40 states that have adopted “people first” language in their state statutes. I respectfully urge your support for this legislation.