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SPONSOR STATEMENT

HOUSE BILL 186

Currently, the definition of a police officer in state statutes includes the words “a full time” employee. This inadvertent language allows police departments in cities, boroughs, municipalities and even state agencies to potentially hire otherwise unqualified police officers under “part time” and “seasonal” conditions. Allowing this loophole to stand has potentially devastating impacts on the integrity of public safety in our state. Officers taking advantage of this loophole can have their investigation procedures called into question, which can result in criminal cases being thrown out. More importantly, the public receives a mixed message with the knowledge that the individuals patrolling their villages, towns and cities might not be held to the same standards of conduct. For the general public to accept the institutions of law and order, the members of those bodies must have reputations that are above all suspicion.

House Bill 186 disentangles this grey area by replacing “a full time employee” with “an employee.” Though it may seem a very simple textual change, this modification now covers all individuals employed in the state with police powers. Police departments in all corners of Alaska now are held to the same level of conduct and competency. Unqualified persons have no role in patrolling our streets and highways thanks to a technicality. With the passage of House Bill 186, we can ensure that the foremost citizens of our state will be the only ones wearing the uniform of an officer.

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