

Alaska Legislature

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House Bill 88

Sponsor Statement

A society is judged rightly by the manner in which it regards those members who have a disability. Respect and inclusiveness is a hallmark of a compassionate and dignified culture, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the language used for people with intellectual disabilities. “Mental retardation,” originally a clinical term introduced with good intentions, has been transformed into a derogatory term that is sometimes used to degrade and insult people with intellectual disabilities. We have recognized the power of words to inflict pain with regard to race, and have taken great strides to foster an environment that rectifies that wrong. Yet even today, many do not recognize the hurtful, dehumanizing and exclusive effects of the word “retard(ed).”

House Bill 88 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.” While neither expanding nor diminishing services, rights, responsibilities or educational opportunities of individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, these changes provide the more respectful and inclusive language these women and men of our state deserve. These changes will also make our state statutes consistent with language in federal law, the Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organization, and the White House through the President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities.

More than 40 states have adopted “people first” language in their state statutes. Alaska should not be an outlier when it comes to matters such as this. Implementing House Bill 88 rectifies this. I respectfully urge your support for this legislation.