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January 28, 2016

The Honorable Kevin Meyer
President of the Senate
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 111
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear President Meyer:

Under the authority of Article III, Section 18, of the Alaska Constitution, I am transmitting a bill relating to sport fishing, hunting, or trapping licenses, tags, or permits; relating to penalties for certain sport fishing, hunting, and trapping license violations; relating to restrictions on the issuance of sport fishing, hunting, and trapping licenses; creating violations and amending fines and restitution for certain fish and game offenses; relating to commercial fishing violations; allowing lost federal matching funds from the Pittman - Robertson, Dingell - Johnson/Wallop - Breaux programs to be included in an order of restitution; adding a definition of "electronic form;" and amending Rule 5(a)(4), Alaska Rules of Minor Offense Procedure.

The bill would allow a person to correct a citation for not having a sport fishing, hunting, or trapping license, tag, or permit on their person, by bringing a copy of the license, tag, or permit that was valid at the time of the citation to the office of the citing officer or to court. There are many reasons why a person may not have a fishing, hunting, or trapping license on their person in the field. This provision would prevent what may have been an honest mistake from turning into an unnecessary conviction.

In addition, the bill would allow a person to show actual possession of a license or permit in paper or electronic form. Electronic form would mean the display of a license or permit on an electronic device, such as a mobile telephone, tablet, or computer. However, tags are not conducive to display in electronic format, and so are excluded from this provision.

In order to better manage issuance of a fishing, hunting, or trapping license, if a person has had their fishing, hunting, or trapping privileges revoked or suspended in this or any other state, this bill would prohibit them from obtaining a fishing, hunting, or trapping license in Alaska. A person should not be able to avoid sanctions merely by obtaining another license.

The bill also gives greater discretion to prosecutors and law enforcement by allowing almost all fish and game offenses to be charged as violations rather than criminal offenses. Currently, if a person violates certain fish and game laws, they can only be charged with a criminal offense. A criminal

conviction is not always appropriate, nor is it necessarily the best outcome for the State or the offender. By creating the option of a violation where the offender acts without any culpable mental state, prosecutors and law enforcement can more appropriately enforce the State's fish and game laws while maximizing public use and enjoyment.

One of the ways Alaska manages its fish and game resources is through the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. The sale of licenses helps track the harvest of resources and sustains important conservation and management programs. Under the Pittman - Robertson, Dingell - Johnson programs, the State receives significant federal funding for fish and game management activities that is matched at a 3:1 ratio using license revenue. When a person fails to obtain a license, the State loses an important funding source used to manage fish and game resources. The bill would allow the State to collect restitution when a person fails to obtain a lawful hunting or fishing license, including lost federal funds.

The bill also increases the strict liability fine limits on commercial fishing violations as well as restitution amounts for unlawfully taking an animal. The increased fines and restitution amounts are necessary to ensure that more people can use and enjoy the resource by deterring illegal fishing and hunting that harms other users.

The bill would directly amend Rule 5(a)(4), Alaska Rules of Minor Offense Procedure to allow a person charged with engaging in hunting or sport fishing without a license to present proof of compliance to the appropriate court or municipality in order for the citation to be dismissed.

Protecting the proper use of Alaska's resources is one of our most important responsibilities. I urge your prompt and favorable action on this measure.

Sincerely,



Bill Walker
Governor

Enclosure