

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

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Pelican · Petersburg · Point Baker · Port Alexander · Port Protection · Sitka · Tenakee Springs · Thorne Bay · Whale Pass

rep.jonathan.kreiss-tomkins@akleg.gov

Committees:
State Affairs, Chair
Fisheries
Judiciary



Juneau, Alaska 99801 (Jan. – April)
State Capitol, Room 411
907.465.3732

Sitka, Alaska 99835 (May – Dec.)
201 Katlian Street, Ste. 103
907.747.4665

HB 181 Sponsor Statement

House Bill 181 will move the authority to set legislative session per diem for legislators from Legislative Council (composed of legislators), and assign it to the State Officers Compensation Commission, an independent commission composed of Alaska citizens.

Since 1994, legislative per diem — the daily rate that legislators receive for lodging, meals, and incidentals during session — has been set by Legislative Council, a joint House and Senate committee which deals with legislative business on behalf of all sixty legislators.

Under HB 181, the Alaska State Officers Compensation Commission (SOCC) would set legislative session per diem instead. The commission's job, as currently required by statute, is to recommend salaries for the governor, the lieutenant governor, legislators, commissioners, and deputy commissioners, as well as their benefits and allowances. HB 181 would add legislative session per diem to that list, to ensure that legislator per diem is set at a reasonable level, to de-politicize the issue, and to ensure an independent and objective process.

The commission is made up of five Alaska private citizens who are appointed by the Governor. SOCC Commissioners may not be employed by the state; may not serve as members of another state board, commission, or authority; and may not hold elected state or municipal office. In addition, SOCC commissioners may not serve in any office or position for which the Commission makes recommendations during the four years preceding their term.

The authority to set per diem is consistent with duties that the commission already performs. SOCC consults Alaska's historical data on salary and compensation rates, as well as comparative data from other states, to set salaries. The commission can approach legislative per diem in a similarly thoughtful, depoliticized, objective, and independent way.

HB 181 would relieve legislators from being in the position of setting their own compensation. It would empower an impartial body to compensate legislators equitably, without engaging in party politics.