



# Representative Scott Jiu Wo Kawasaki

Alaska State Legislature

District 1 Fairbanks

## HB 118 Sponsor Statement

*“An Act relating to compensation for wrongful conviction and imprisonment”*

Our judicial system is meant to incarcerate the guilty and protect the innocent. If the system fails Alaskans, then the state is responsible to help the innocent get back on their feet.

With increasing technology, DNA exonerations have been on the rise. There have been 349 post-conviction DNA exonerations since 1989 with the vast majority occurring since 2000. These individuals spent an average of 14 years behind bars and were released into a changed world. House Bill 118 gives these wrongfully imprisoned victims a chance to start a new life and integrate back into society.

Specifically, HB 118 creates an administrative process whereby victims of overturned criminal convictions can request compensation from the state for time served. They can be compensated up to \$50,000 per year with a lifetime cap at \$2 million, University of Alaska tuition for themselves and their children, state-funded health care including mental health services, up to 3 years of state-funded job training services and economic damages including lost wages and attorney fees. In order to qualify for the compensation, the claimant must have served time in prison and then have been exonerated via retrial, dismissed charges, or executive pardon because of innocence.

While there is no price on the emotional and personal suffering of those who were wrongfully imprisoned, HB 118 would bring Alaska up to the federal compensation standards to help right the state's wrong. Financial compensation would help victims of wrongful imprisonment repair their lives by covering costs of education, healthcare, housing and transportation.

Thirty-two states and the District of Columbia have some sort of compensation statute. Every innocent person, regardless of how they became incarcerated, deserves just compensation for the time they wrongly served. HB 118 is a stepping stone in a long process towards ensuring justice for all Alaskans.

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