



Representative Ivy Spohnholz

House Health & Social Services Committee Chair

House District 16: College Gate, Russian Jack, Nunaka Valley, Reflection Lake & Wonder Park

Committee Member: Education, Energy, Military & Veterans Affairs, Legislative Budget & Audit

Sponsor Statement

House Bill 351

HB 351 is a statutory cleanup bill which updates the terms used to describe the facilities operated by the Division of Juvenile Justice and provides updated definitions for those terms. Current statutes contain references to facilities which DJJ does not operate, and facilities that do not exist in the state of Alaska. The bill also makes a clear distinction between the role of juvenile probation officers and adult probation officers in places where the difference is unclear. HB 351 also requires staff of juvenile justice to be added to the list of mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect. These updates are necessary to provide statutory clarity to ensure the Division can manage its facilities effectively throughout the state.

Currently, Alaska Statutes reference places like work camps and juvenile detention homes, which are not recognized or operating in the state of Alaska. HB 351 adds juvenile treatment facility, juvenile detention facility, and temporary secure juvenile holding area as facilities currently being operated by the division and provides clear definitions for each of these terms. Because references to these facilities occur in many places in statute, this bill also touches upon many sections of statute. These changes are necessary to provide the clearest regulation over facilities in existence and operated by the DJJ.

HB 351 also clarifies the role of juvenile and adult probation officers, first by distinguishing clearly between the two, and second by providing a clear definition for the term juvenile probation officer. These are meaningful changes to provide the best protection for juveniles in the custody of the Division of Juvenile Justice.

Lastly, HB 351 adds DJJ staff to the list of mandatory reporters. It is the Division's objective to engage in the rehabilitation of juvenile offenders. Adding DJJ staff to the list of mandatory reporters provides the best guarantee that when DJJ staff discover cases of child abuse and neglect, those cases are reported, investigated, and resolved for the best interest of the child.

While these technical language updates touch many sections of statute, these language changes do not significantly alter the authority of the Division over juveniles in its care. Rather, these updates protect juveniles by making it clear where juveniles can be placed and clearly defining the authority of DJJ, its staff, and facilities using current and relevant language.