

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Session

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Chairman

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REPRESENTATIVE JASON GRENN

SPONSOR STATEMENT

House Bill 44

Legislative Ethics: Voting & Conflicts

House Bill 44 aims to provide assurances that legislators are representing the public interest, promote transparency within state government, and bring Alaska's laws into conformity with most other states.

Currently, roughly half of U.S. state legislative bodies ban legislators from voting on legislation when they have a substantial financial interest in its outcome. HB 44 would bring Alaska in line with most other states by establishing a stronger conflict of interest standard than currently exists in Alaska statute. More clearly defining when a legislator has a voting conflict not only provides guidance on when conflicts should be declared, but also ensures for the public that true conflicts are being acknowledged and addressed by their elected officials.

HB 44 contains provisions to ensure conflicts are "substantial" before a legislator would be required to abstain from voting. Any benefit a legislator or a member of the legislator's immediate family might receive from supporting a particular piece of legislation would have to be greater than the benefit a large group of Alaskans would receive in order to require abstention. The bill recognizes the responsibility of legislators to vote, except in clear cases where the outcome of the vote would result in substantial personal financial gain. This includes cases where an immediate family member or a legislator's employer would receive a large and direct financial benefit.

Alaska has a strong history of standing apart from the rest of the country and blazing a trail for our state. However, in the case of legislative conflict of interest reform, the manner in which our standards set us apart from the rest of the nation does not best serve Alaskans. HB 44 seeks to bring Alaska in line with most other states, increasing transparency and ensuring every vote cast by the Legislature is one case for Alaska.

I urge your consideration and support of HB 44.