

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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SPONSOR STATEMENT

Senate Bill 15

“An Act relating to the Open Meetings Act; and establishing a civil penalty for violations of the open meeting requirements by members of governmental bodies.”

The Open Meetings Act requires that all meetings of an Alaska governmental body of a public entity be open to the public, unless exempt by statute (the Legislature and Judiciary are exempt). Despite the challenges of public gathering brought on by COVID-19, it is essential that elected officials continue to abide by the Open Meetings Act and hold meetings that are available to the public. During the summer of 2020, residents of Anchorage tried repeatedly to attend and testify at assembly meetings in person, but to no avail. The Assembly capped attendance at 15 people, preventing anyone but members, staff, and the press from attending.

Senate Bill 15 would establish a civil penalty of up to \$1,000 for elected or appointed members of governmental bodies who violate the Open Meetings Act. The purpose of Senate Bill 15 is to encourage the continuation of open public meetings, despite current and future challenges.

In 1965, the late Senator Ted Stevens — then Representative Stevens — introduced House Bill 170, “An Act requiring that the meetings of agencies of the state and its subdivisions be open to the public with certain exceptions,” which we now know as the Open Meetings Act. His original bill included a fine of up to \$1,000 for elected officials who violated the Act.