

Alaska State Senate

Senator Forrest Dunbar

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SPONSOR STATEMENT

SB 104: CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUND

SB 104 CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUND safeguards low-income Alaskans' access to the civil justice system by increasing the funding available for the Alaska Legal Services Corporation.

It amends the statute creating the Civil Legal Services Fund (AS 37.05.590) so that up to twenty-five percent of Court System filing fees can be appropriated by the Legislature to the existing Civil Legal Services Fund each year to provide access to civil legal aid for low-income Alaskans with critical legal needs. Legislation allowing the legislature to appropriate filing fees for ALSC was passed in 2018. It was originally set at 25% but lowered to 10% with the intention to reassess the need for a higher appropriation later; those contributions are now necessary to fully support their clients in need.

The Alaska Legal Services Corporation, established in 1967, is not a state agency; it is a nonprofit charitable 501(c)(3), whose funding comes from a variety of state, federal, and private sources. The Alaska Legal Services Corporation strives to serve a growing number of low-income applicants. Since 1984, the number of Alaskans eligible for legal services has more than doubled, from 41,000 to over 128,850. Yet currently, the state's contribution to the Alaska Legal Services Corporation is only a fraction of what it was 30 years ago.

Senate Bill 104 aims to stabilize the Alaska Legal Services Corporation funding and help ensure that civil legal aid is available to all Alaskans, not just the few who can afford it. I urge you to join me in supporting SB 104.