

Alaska State Legislature

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Senate Bill 205 Sponsor Statement

“An Act relating to occupational disability benefits for peace officers and firefighters.”

Senate Bill 205 strengthens Alaska’s commitment to the peace officers and firefighters who protect our communities by improving the occupational disability benefits available to them when they are injured in the line of duty.

Under current law, a peace officer or firefighter who becomes disabled while serving the public receives an occupational disability benefit equal to 40% of their gross monthly compensation at the time they left service. SB 205 increases that benefit to 75% after the first 12 months of eligibility. This change applies to members of both the Public Employees’ Retirement System Defined Benefit Plan and the Defined Contribution Plan, ensuring equitable treatment across retirement tiers. The bill also provides for an immediate effective date.

Peace officers and firefighters work in some of the most dangerous professions in Alaska. They face life-threatening emergencies, hazardous environments, and physically demanding conditions every day. Alaska’s extreme weather, vast geography, and remote communities can intensify those risks, increasing the likelihood that an injury may permanently end a first responder’s career.

When a first responder is injured in the line of duty, the financial consequences can be devastating. The sudden loss of income, combined with medical expenses and long-term recovery needs, places significant strain on individuals and their families. Increasing the occupational disability benefit to 75% helps ensure that injured peace officers and firefighters can maintain financial stability and dignity if they are unable to return to work.

This legislation also supports recruitment and retention. At a time when many Alaska communities struggle to attract and keep qualified peace officers and firefighters, strong occupational disability protections signal that the State stands behind those who serve. Providing meaningful security in the event of a career-ending injury makes these essential professions more sustainable and appealing.

Finally, SB 205 is a clear acknowledgment of the sacrifices first responders make on behalf of all Alaskans. It demonstrates that when they risk their lives to keep our communities safe, we will be there for them if they are harmed in the process.

Senate Bill 205 ensures that peace officers and firefighters who are disabled while serving honorably receive a livable benefit that reflects the value of their service and the risks they undertake every day for the safety of others.