



Senator Scott Jiu Wo Kawasaki

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Senate Bill 195 - 34-LS0974\A Sponsor Statement

“An Act relating to slow onset disaster; and relating to the Alaska Disaster Act.”

Whenever we think of disasters, we think of the sudden onset of a weather event, such as an earthquake, an avalanche, or a flash flood. These are incidents that have little to no warning, cause massive destruction, and have clearly identifiable start and endpoints. However, slow onset disasters develop gradually and occur over a longer period of time which can cause just as much devastation. Alaska’s current Disaster Act only addresses sudden disasters and lacks provisions to address the rise of slow onset disasters due to a changing climate.

Senate Bill 195 seeks to update the Alaska Disaster Act to ensure that our State’s disaster plans consider and recognize this type of disaster in statute, ensuring the right expertise is present at each level of planning, and that funds will be available to mitigate and handle slow onset disasters.

By including planning for and mitigation of slow onset disasters, Alaska will be better prepared for the natural occurrences that are on the rise. Melting permafrost, coastal erosion, and intense storms are already ravaging our state, but our current disaster plan does not account for these events. Part of the purpose of Title 26 is to direct resources to mitigate disasters, but since the current statute does not include slow onset disasters in the definition, there are little to no mitigation efforts being directed toward this type of event. This means the State must deal with the expensive process of handling a slow onset disaster after it has already run its course. On average, every dollar spent on mitigation saves six dollars in post-disaster recovery costs.

This is especially poignant for slow onset disasters since, by their nature, they can be predicted in advance compared to a sudden disaster. Senate Bill 195 updates the definition of a disaster to include slow onset disasters and updates to both the Alaska State Emergency Response Commission and each local emergency planning committee to ensure that experts in this field are included in the efforts to mitigate these situations. I urge you to please join me in supporting Senate Bill 195.