



**Senator Scott Jiu Wo Kawasaki**

Serving Fairbanks, Fort Wainwright & Badger Road

## **Senate Bill 167 - Wrongful Convictions Overturned: Receive Past PFD**

Sponsor Statement - Version I 34-LS049/I

"An act relating to edibility of criminal offenders for certain benefits, including the permanent fund dividend; relating to a permanent funding dividend for an individual who conviction has been vacated, reversed, or dismissed; and relating to the calculation of the value of the permanent fund dividend by including payment to individuals eligible for a permanent fund dividend because of a conviction that has been vacated, reversed, or dismissed."

The State of Alaska has a duty to ensure that those convicted of crimes are prosecuted fairly and justly. If an Alaskan is wrongly convicted, the State has a moral and legal duty to restore, as much as possible, what was taken from them. Under current law, incarcerated Alaskans are ineligible for the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD). This bill aims to return unawarded PFDs to Alaskans who were denied their dividends solely because of wrongful incarceration.

This legislation focuses on restoration, not compensation. Transitioning back to society for formerly incarcerated individuals is a significant challenge, often marked by the loss of education, training and years of meaningful experiences. These struggles are worsened by the loss of the modest but essential income from the PFD. While we cannot recover the years lost due to wrongful conviction, the bill restores the monetary value of PFDS to support a successful reentry into civilian life.

Although the bill seeks to correct past injustices for the exonerated, it also highlights the commitment to public safety and the integrity of the PFD program. It includes a strict ban on anyone convicted of murder from receiving a PFD reserving benefits for those the justice system failed in and maintaining a firm stance against violent offenders.

If the legislation passes, those eligible due to overturned convictions must apply to the PFD within one year of their new judgment or of the effective date of the bill. It also extends this application period to those Alaskans who were wrongly convicted and later exonerated.

All applicants would follow the existing process used for past PFD applications. The change is expected to add only a few applicants to the hundreds already paid annually from the reserve for prior year dividends.

In 2017, a similar version of this bill passed the House as HB 127 with an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 38-1. I ask for your support so Alaska can uphold its principles of justice.

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