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ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE HOUSE DISTRICT 23 EAGLE RIVER VALLEY

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SPONSOR STATEMENT HB 183

DESIGNATE SEX FOR SCHOOL-SPONSORED SPORTS

It is in our very recent history that women — and the men who champion them — have had to fight for women's rights and equality in our society. Can you believe it has barely been 100 years since women were granted the right to vote? Since then, we have come a long way, with legislation supporting and protecting women's rights and protecting us from discrimination. Our culture has embraced and advanced the notion that women deserve the same opportunities as men. And we have made leaps and bounds in opportunities available to women and girls to participate in sports.

Girls who participate in sports reap huge benefits for a lifetime. They gain confidence, good habits, strong bodies, and bones, and have a lower chance of osteoporosis, breast cancer, and depression. They have a more positive body image and higher levels of self-esteem. They grow into strong women who are leaders and role models in our communities. They carry the lessons learned far beyond the playing field. And thanks to Title IX, their right to equal opportunities in sports and education is federally protected.

Title IX states that, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." We can thank our very own Senator Ted Stevens for this legislation which has protected and promoted women in sports since its passage in 1972. The impact of this legislation is profound. Before 1972, one in 27 girls participated in sports. That number is now two in five! Girls' participation in high school sports has increased by roughly 1000 percent. It has opened the door to more sports scholarship opportunities for women and for women to turn their sport into a career. We could even say that the effects of more women in sports has rippled out across all sectors, breaking glass ceilings and elevating women as equals in our nation and even around the world.

So, what happens when a biological male enters the ring of women's sports? Being biologically bigger, stronger, faster, their physical advantage over women is anything but equal. It takes our nearly level playing field, which we fought so hard to achieve, and reduces it to women finishing second again. Women have worked hard to get where we are today. To set us back 100 years is unacceptable.

When there were threatened changes to Title IX, Sen. Ted Stevens said: "Having lived this long with Title IX, I'm going to urge Congress not to support any changes that could have an adverse effect on the progress that has already been made under Title IX. We want more progress." Stevens was the guardian angel of women in athletics. He would not stand by and allow culture wars to rob our girls and women of the progress we have fought so hard to gain.

As a mom of two daughters, I would like to encourage the State legislature in a bipartisan effort to support "An Act relating to school athletics, recreation, athletic teams, and sports." This bill HB 183 acknowledges the biological differences and disparities between men and women and requires students to play according to their biological sex. Our girls deserve a fair playing field. They deserve the chance to win first place, scholarships, and gold medals.

Like US Senator Ted Stevens, I will be a champion for our girls and women. I have endured discrimination and have conquered obstacles, like my mom and grandmother and great-grandmother before me, so that my daughters don't have to. I don't do this for me, I do it for them. We fight for all our daughters. Expecting women to be physically equal to men is not equality. Equality is giving women the same opportunities as men. But if forced to physically compete against biological males, women will be disadvantaged once again. If men can compete as "better" versions of women, all of our progress for equality is dead.