

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



WORLD TRADE

RULES COMMITTEE

COMMUNITY & REGIONAL AFFAIRS

LABOR & COMMERCE

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SENATOR BERTA GARDNER

SENATE DEMOCRATIC LEADER

SENATE DISTRICT I

Sponsor Statement

SCR1 - Uniform Rules: Abstain From Voting

There is a growing public concern about conflict-of-interest voting and a lack of transparency in the process. When a legislator declares a conflict and asks to be excused from voting, our Uniform Rules require unanimous consent, a unique requirement among the states according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. While there have been many proposals to address the issue of conflict-of-interest and voting, with more currently under consideration, this legislation seeks only to address the issue of transparency, adding a requirement that there be public record of the member's name and description of the conflict, and the name(s) of those who oppose an excusal from voting.

As a citizen legislature, members come from all walks of life. It is natural that members might have personal investments in our state that could be affected by the legislative body. For these circumstances, our ethics statutes seek to address these conflicts of interest by requiring members to announce any 'substantial interest' as it is defined under AS 24.60.990(b).

This resolution does not change our ethics statutes or voting procedure, nor does it seek to change the requirement of unanimous consent. This resolution simply addresses the issue of documentation of members seeking to be excused from a vote, their reason for doing so, and the members who object. This information would be recorded in the journal so that interested members of the public have access to these sensitive voting issues.

I ask that you assist me in improving our visibility and transparency in Alaska by joining me in support of this resolution. For more information, please contact Senator Gardner's staff, Samantha Harris, at 465-6853 or Samantha.Harris@akleg.gov.