

Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of Senate Bill 30, State Park Permits for Disabled Veterans. I am Captain Bob Pawlowski, NOAA (Ret) and a VA Beneficiary. Currently I serve as the Chair, Alaska Pioneer Homes Advisory Board, a board that advises the Governor on our Pioneer Homes, including the Alaska State Veterans and Pioneer Home in Palmer. I also serve on the Alaska Commission on Aging, where I personally focus on our aging Veteran population, of which 30% are of the Vietnam Era, which ended 50 years ago. This is a good bill in it offers an opportunity for our disabled Veterans to fully utilize Alaska's State Parks, versus just camping without charge. This is particularly valuable to those disabled seniors who, with age, have had to decrease their camping given the challenges of setting up and taking down a camp. This bill affords them the opportunity to continue to visit our State Parks and enjoy the amenities, ease of access, and outdoor activities on a daily basis that for decades they have enjoyed under their camping permit.

Let me share a personal example of how it will help. Since 2015, I have volunteered and participated in Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing – Alaska, a therapeutic program for disabled Vets that teaches fly tying, rod building and fly fishing with a group of their peers. Through camaraderie and focus on the fine motor and mental skills in tying flies and building rods, they find new ways to meet their challenges. And, when they are out together with other disabled Vets, catching their first fish on their own fly on their own rod, you see their pride and the value of the program. And this is but one of many programs in Alaska that are helping our disabled Vets adapt and heal by being outdoors .

By offering no charge access to our state parks for Alaska's disabled Vets, you are enabling them to take more time to be outdoors and enjoy the Alaska they have chosen to live and grow old in.

Thank you. I am free to answer any questions.

*(Captain Bob Pawlowski, NOAA (Ret) has been active in military and veteran issues since moving permanently to Alaska. He remains active with the Military Officers Association of America, the Navy League of the United States, and most recently on the AARP Alaska Veteran Program. .He lives in Anchorage with his wife Paula.)*