



# Senator Scott Jiu Wo Kawasaki

Alaska State Legislature

Senate District P

## **SB 117 State Commission for Civil Rights**

### **Sponsor Statement**

*"An Act renaming the State Commission for Human Rights the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights; relating to removal of commissioners of the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights; relating to reports from the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights; relating to the definition of 'employer' for the purposes of the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights; and relating to local civil rights commissions."*

Senate Bill 117 provides an overhaul of the Alaska State Commission on Human Rights (ASCHR, or Commission) to reflect the work and duties of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

The Commission consists of seven commissioners appointed by the governor. Their mandate is to adopt and enforce regulations related to employment discrimination because of physical and mental disabilities. A person aggrieved by an alleged discriminatory practice may file a complaint with the Commission. The Commission may investigate, hold hearings, and potentially order appropriate relief. However, in current law this protection does not extend to workers at Alaska's many nonprofit organizations. SB117 would change the name of the State Commission for Human Rights to the Alaska State Commission for Civil Rights. SB 117 adds a requirement that the governor can only remove a commissioner for cause. Cause could include incompetence, neglect, misconduct, or public or private statements that undermine the commission's work. In current law, a commissioner can be removed for any reason. SB 117 would change the timing and method of the commission's annual report to the legislature. Instead of the week before convening, the report would be due on November 15. The report could be delivered electronically instead of requiring paper copies. SB 117 would add a defense against a discrimination claim if the employer is a religious organization and the employee is hired for a religious purpose and modifies the definition of "employer" in the ASCHR statutes to include these workers.

The new provisions in SB 117 will allow the commission to perform to its highest potential and to fully assist Alaskans from both the private and non-profit sectors. As times change the need for a more robust commission is in demand. SB 117 will give the commission the leeway and latitude to fulfill its mission.