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Governor Sean Parnell  
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February 4, 2013

The Honorable Charlie Huggins  
President of the Senate  
Alaska State Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 111  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear President Huggins,

Under the authority of Article III, Section 18 of the Alaska Constitution, I am transmitting a bill relating to election practices and procedures; and relating to the election of an advisory school board in a regional educational attendance area.

The bill would make a number of changes to the Election Code and related statutes. These good government changes are necessary to assure voter access to his or her ballot, and to maximize efficiency in conducting State-run elections while harmonizing certain provisions of State and federal election law.

The bill would also shift the date of the primary election and associated candidacy withdrawal and petition deadlines. The bill would move the date of the primary from the fourth Tuesday in August to the second Tuesday in August of every even-numbered year. The purpose of moving the date is to assure that the Division of Elections can timely comply with provisions of federal law requiring the Division to transmit ballots to military and overseas voters 45 days before a federal election. Candidates would be required to withdraw their name 52 days rather than 48 days before the primary, and judges up for retention would be required to withdraw 64 days rather than 48 days before a general election. Similarly, deadlines governing the nomination of candidates by party petition where an unopposed incumbent dies, is disqualified, or is incapacitated, and for filling vacancies by party petition, would change.

The bill would specify that the Division of Elections may conduct elections for advisory school boards in regional educational attendance areas. The Division already is required to conduct elections to regional educational attendance area boards, and this change would specify that the Division could – but would not be required – to do the same for local advisory boards.

The bill would allow a qualified voter residing outside the United States to register to vote absentee if the qualified voter's parent or guardian was domiciled in Alaska immediately before leaving the

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United States. This provision is aimed at voters who reach 18 years of age while living abroad with their parent or guardian.

The bill would allow the Division of Elections to designate municipal clerks to act as absentee voting officials to distribute absentee ballots to qualified voters and their representatives. This portion of the bill aims to resolve difficulties associated with finding individuals to act as absentee voting officials, particularly in more rural areas of the state, by allowing municipal clerks to act in this capacity and thereby reach greater numbers of absentee voters.

The bill would also streamline several aspects of the absentee voting process. The bill would clarify that voters (other than uniformed services voters or overseas voters) who apply to receive their ballots by electronic transmission must, by regulation, be required to comply with the same ballot application deadlines applicable to absentee voting in person. The bill would repeal the concept of the "special absentee ballot" and make official ballots for overseas and military voters available 45 days before a federal election. All regular statewide elections also have federal offices on the ballot. Federal law requires the Division of Elections to transmit ballots to military and overseas voters 45 days before an election. The purpose of the State change would be to eliminate the 60 day advance "special absentee ballot" and make a single, official ballot available to voters overseas, in the military, and in remote areas of the state available on a timeframe consistent with federal law. Sending two ballots often causes voter confusion.

Finally, the bill would harmonize State and federal law by adding definitions of "absent uniformed services voter" and "overseas voter" to the Election Code.

I urge your prompt and favorable action on this measure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sean Parnell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "S".

Sean Parnell  
Governor

Enclosure