

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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## Senator Cathy Giessel

### SB 84 Military Youth Academy Sponsor Statement

SB 84 will amend state statute to change the funding mechanism for the Alaska Military Youth Academy, establish the program within the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs, and update the program name. Currently, the Alaska Military Youth Academy receives one third of its funding from a per student calculation that was established in 2002. While the intent of this funding formula was to protect funding for a fledgling program with a guaranteed level of funding, the Alaska Military Youth Academy has grown and proven to be highly successful and viable. The base student allocation calculation is no longer necessary. By moving to a direct appropriation, the funding will be based on the program's needs and success.

The Alaska Military Youth Academy began as a ten-state pilot program operated by the National Guard Youth "ChallenNGe Program". Governor Walter J. Hickel, along with Major General Hugh L. Cox signed an agreement on October 15, 1993, establishing the pilot program the Alaska National Guard Youth Corps. By 1998, the program was approved as a permanent program and in 1999, Senator Ted Stevens worked with the legislature and encouraged changing the name of the program to the Alaska Military Youth Academy, but it was not formally changed in Alaska Statute. The Academy, operating within the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs, is an accredited special purpose school that helps Alaskan youth make positive life changes.

Their mission is, "To help intervene in and reclaim the lives of at-risk youth and produce program graduates with the values, skills, education, and self-discipline to succeed as adults." The Academy is based on the ChallenNGe Program, targeting men and women 16-18 years of age who have dropped out of high school. Cadets complete a 22-week residential school program based on the traditional military training model. In addition to working to obtain a high school diploma or GED, cadets receive instruction in life coping skills, job training, service to the community, leadership, and responsible citizenship. The Academy has been essential in intervening to help young people become productive members of society.

The Academy has received numerous national and state awards and accolades for their successful program and service to the community through mentorship, drug and alcohol abuse prevention, academic excellence and innovative job skills training. Of the 33 programs offered in 27 different states and the territory of Puerto Rico, Alaska is noted for being among the top five programs in the nation. In nearly 20 years, the Academy has graduated almost 4,000 cadets. This program provides opportunities for young men and women to thrive and achieve their goals despite failures or obstacles in the past. Many of the graduates have gone on to join the military or continue their education. Program participants leave the program as responsible productive citizens and have collectively donated thousands of hours of community service. With the right opportunities, mentoring, and intervention, our youth can turn their lives around and reach their full potential.

The funding formula for the Academy was designed to provide a secure source of funding for a fledgling program. Over the past decade, the Academy has proven to be a successful program that can stand on its own merits. It is time to change the funding mechanism from student-based to results-based so that the Academy can continue impacting the lives of at-risk youth by setting them on the path of success.

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