

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

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Sponsor Statement

HB 179 – Meal program donations; fish and game

Hunting and fishing is at the heart of our shared heritage as Alaskans. Every Alaskan looks forward to the season he or she can again fill the freezer with salmon, moose, caribou, seal, or berries. Alaskans happily share this food with family, children, and elders.

This sharing is not possible in our public institutions, however. Well-meaning state laws intended to prevent the commercialization of wild game have also largely prevented children in schools and elders in hospitals and senior centers from eating the traditional Alaska foods that we treasure. As a result, even though we are surrounded by some of the best food in the world, our children eat corn dogs rather than caribou at school lunch; our elders are served spaghetti rather than seal.

HB 179 allows public and nonprofit schools, medical facilities, senior centers, and residential child care facilities to accept and serve donated subsistence- and sport-caught fish, game, plants, and eggs in their food service programs. Currently, this is illegal if the food service program accepting the donation charges for the meal at any point before it is consumed. This means schools and senior centers are unable to provide meals containing subsistence- or sport-caught wild food if they accept any payment, including payment from federal or state meal programs.

The bill also ensures traditional wild foods donated to and served by food service programs are safe to eat. The Department of Environmental Conservation already has regulations in place providing for the safe handling and processing of many traditional wild foods. HB 179 affirms the Department's authority to oversee the safety of these foods.

HB 179 will nourish Alaska's children and elders, both physically and spiritually. It will limit the amount of expensive and unhealthy processed food shipped to communities that have incredible food available just a short boat or snowmachine ride away. Children will develop an appreciation where their food comes from and elders will be able to keep eating the foods they love.