

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senate Bill 233—PFD Allowable Absence/Merchant Marine

Sponsor Statement

“An Act relating to allowable absences for permanent fund dividend qualification; and providing for an effective date.”

In 1999, House Bill 157 was offered by Representative Jerry Sanders. The bill added those serving under articles of employment aboard oceangoing vessels of the US Merchant Marine to an allowable absence for the purposes of qualifying for the permanent fund dividend. At the time, the apprenticeship program that qualified them for these careers as commercial sailors was an allowable absence. This program was created in part with the help of Congressman Don Young, and decades ago when touring a ship, the Congressman had asked “where are all of the Alaskans?” To his disappointment, there were no Alaskans working on the ship. This interaction helped begin an effort to train more Alaskans for careers in the US Merchant Marine.

The intent of the 1999 legislation was to allow merchant mariners and trainees to qualify for an allowable absence, with that intent clearly expressed through the testimony and supporting documents for the original bill. Since 1999, over 750 Alaskans have graduated from the Harry Lundeberg School of Seamanship and the Paul Hall Center. However, due to statutes and regulations that have been amended since then, Alaskans who participate in this training program remain ineligible for the permanent fund dividend while they are out of state receiving the training.

Senate Bill 233 would amend state statute to include an allowable absence for Alaskans attending a merchant marine training program, so they are not disincentivized from attending.