

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI

Sponsor Statement

Senate Bill 161

Updated for CS SB 161 (JUD) (32-LS1361\B)

Senate Bill 161 simplifies the process for political parties gaining official recognition by recognizing any party with at least 5,000 registered voters. This bill would replace the current variable threshold with a standard that is simple and consistent. The 5,000 threshold would be adjusted for population changes after every 10 year census, and rounded to the nearest 500.

Currently political parties gain or maintain official recognition by having registered voters equal to at least 3% of the total votes cast for governor, U.S. Senate, or U.S. House of Representatives in the last election depending on which office was on the ballot that year. This threshold can vary wildly from election to election and after the 2020 election it increased by 27% because of record voter turnout.

With the passage of Ballot Measure 2, official party status will no longer be used to determine ballot access for candidates for governor and lieutenant governor, U.S. Congress, or Alaska State Legislature. The only offices for which officially recognized parties will have automatic ballot access are U.S. president and vice president. Parties with much fewer than 5,000 registered voters routinely secure ballot access by petition and SB 161 will save the Division of Elections the time and expense of reviewing petitions for parties that have already demonstrated a significant amount of support.

Officially recognized parties have the right to purchase two pages in the Official Election Pamphlet, to nominate poll workers and election board members, and to have observers present at polling places and counting centers. In addition, there are different campaign finance limits and reporting requirements for recognized parties and unrecognized parties. SB 161 ensures that this status is determined by a simple, consistent, and easy to understand threshold.

Thank you for your consideration.