

# 32ND ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



## REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON

### Sponsor Statement for House Bill 226

The Alaska Department of Law, Public Defender Agency and Office of Public Advocacy have struggled in recent years to attract and retain attorneys. HB 226 provides a much-needed boost in pay for these essential legal personnel by raising pay rates for state employed lawyers by 10 percent across the board.

The State, as an employer, is unable to compete with salaries offered by the private sector and has even started to lag other public sector employers in compensation. Further aggravating this difficulty is the fact that state lawyers fall into the classification of “partially exempt” employees, meaning they do not belong to a union and can only receive pay increases at the behest of the legislature. A pay increase for this employee class has not taken place since 2015.

Factors that previously attracted attorneys to state service like certain pensions or a chance for more work life balance are no longer a reality. Lawyers across state agencies are experiencing a higher-than-average volume of work due to vacancies and this has led to increased turnover. A lack of adequate compensation and large workloads create a self-perpetuating cycle of burn out and non-retention.

Our criminal justice system relies on prosecutors to ensure that laws are being enforced and public defenders to guarantee that low-income defendants receive the representation they are entitled to. Additionally, Department of Law attorneys deal with litigation on varied and important topics like consumer protection, oil tax disputes and child support. Without quality pay we will not be able to keep quality legal professionals working in the public sector. HB 226 is a small and concrete step the legislature can take to make employment as a state lawyer more attractive and palatable to those in the legal profession.

I urge your support for this measure. Please feel free to discuss this issue with me in more detail.