

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

February 27, 2024

3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Scott Kawasaki, Chair
Senator Matt Claman, Vice Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Senator Kelly Merrick

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 185

"An Act establishing the Alaska Military Affairs Commission; and relating to the duties and powers of the Alaska Military Affairs Commission."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 223

"An Act relating to the appointment of an assistant adjutant general; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 185

SHORT TITLE: ESTABLISH AK MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMISSION

SPONSOR(s): STATE AFFAIRS

01/16/24	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/24	(S)	STA, FIN
02/27/24	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 223

SHORT TITLE: ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL APPOINTMENT

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

02/12/24 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/12/24 (S) STA, JUD
02/27/24 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

RILEY VON BORSTEL, Staff
Senator Scott Kawasaki
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional analysis for SB 185.

BRYCE WARD, Mayor
Fairbanks North Star Borough
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Invited testimony for SB 185.

KEITH KLAEHN, representing self
Colorado Springs, Colorado

POSITION STATEMENT: Invited testimony for SB 185.

TAMMIE PERREAULT, Northwest Regional Liaison
Department of Defense (DOD)
Defense-State Liaison Office
Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington

POSITION STATEMENT: Invited testimony for SB 185.

SUSAN ALLMERTH, representing self
Two Rivers, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 185.

CRAIG CHRISTENSON, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented SB 223 on behalf of the administration.

ANGELA LAFLAMME, Legislative Liaison
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional analysis for SB 223.

ACTION NARRATIVE

3:30:22 PM

CHAIR SCOTT KAWASAKI called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to

order were Senators Bjorkman, Merrick, and Chair Kawasaki. Senators Wielechowski and Claman arrived thereafter.

SB 185-ESTABLISH AK MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMISSION

[3:30:53 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 185 "An Act establishing the Alaska Military Affairs Commission; and relating to the duties and powers of the Alaska Military Affairs Commission."

[3:31:27 PM](#)

SCOTT KAWASAKI, Senator, District P, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, speaking as sponsor of SB 185, stated it would establish the Alaska Military Affairs Commission (AMAC). Several other states including North Carolina, Kentucky, Nebraska, and Arkansas recently established similar bodies within their legislature. The Alaska Civilian Armed Services Team (ACAST) will sunset. It was created under executive order to exist within the Department of Veteran and Military Affairs (DMVA) nearly seven years ago. AMAC replaces ACAST and would exist within the Office of the Governor.

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RILEY VON BORSTEL, Staff, Senator Scott Kawasaki, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented SB 185. She said the military's presence in Alaska continues to grow and is one of the largest contributors to the state's economy. Not only is the military a vital component of communities and economy, but the Arctic is becoming increasingly prominent in its role as a strategic location in defense operations. Since the military holds such a significant role in Alaska, it makes sense to establish a body in statute to aid in all matters regarding the military, from advocacy and recommendations to expansion. Doing so would ensure continuity beyond a single governor's administration or a single legislature. The membership of this commission is composed of nine members including the lieutenant governor, who would serve as commission chair, the adjutant general of DMVA or the adjutant general's designee, the commissioner of Commerce, Community Development or their designee, three members who are mayors or their designee from municipalities with military installations within municipal boundaries nominated by an organization that represents two municipal governments within the state and appointed by the governor, two public members with extensive military experience or expertise, each representing a different branch of the armed services appointed by the governor, and one public member with

statewide business or economic development experience appointed by the governor. SB 185 has a fiscal note of \$86,500. This cost covers personnel expenditures or a single Anchorage-based part-time position. Given that the lieutenant governor is the chair of the committee, an assistant will be needed for administrative tasks.

MS. VON BORSTEL presented the sectional analysis for SB 185:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Senate Bill 185 - Alaska Military Affairs Commission
Sectional Summary**

Section 1

- Details that members shall be varied in geographical location to promote representation of military interests throughout the state

Section 2

- Establishes the Alaska Military Affairs Commission in and places responsibility of administrative support on the Office of the Governor
- Defines the Commission membership to include nine voting members.
- Sets (staggered) three-year member terms.
- Details Commission meetings, quorum rules, and authorizes per diem and travel expenses.
- Enumerates the duties of the Commission.

Section 3

- Sunsets the Alaska Military Affairs Commission on June 30, 2030.

Section 4

- Adds uncodified law regarding the initial terms of Alaska Military Affairs Commission members

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CHAIR KAWASAKI announced invited testimony for SB 185.

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BRYCE WARD, Mayor, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Fairbanks, Alaska, said Alaska holds a significant strategic importance to the U.S. due to its close proximity to international borders. He suggested that establishing a military affairs commission could help enhance state readiness and ensure emerging national security challenges are addressed appropriately. The military also plays a critical role in Alaska's economy. A military affairs commission could actively work to strengthen the connection between military presence and Alaska's economic development. He said the military complex holds equal value to the fishing industry in Alaska and represents almost 30 percent of the Fairbanks North Star Borough economy. Military families are also an important part of Alaska's communities, and the commission could enhance the quality of life for military families. Support from the commission would contribute to the wellbeing of the state. He suggested that the commission would align state interests with military priorities, such as infrastructure. Establishing a military commission could serve as a comprehensive and proactive approach to leveraging benefits for military purposes as well as state interests.

[3:38:36 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked for details on the Tiger Team in Fairbanks and its integration with the local Air Force and Fort Wainwright installation.

[3:38:53 PM](#)

MR. WARD replied that the Tiger Team has been in operation for two decades. It brings together community leaders, the congressional delegation, and state legislators to address military concerns specific to the Fairbanks area. The Tiger Team's primary focus revolves around issues such as potential base closure or the warm basing of Eielson Air Force Base (AFB). Force structure changes to Fort Wainwright included recent change to the 11th Airborne Division. This collaborative effort has empowered Fairbanks to actively engage with the military, ensuring that the municipality meets the needs of military personnel and their families effectively. Furthermore, the Tiger Team is actively advocating for significant economic adjustments in the Fairbanks area, including supporting the F35 mission.

[3:40:30 PM](#)

KEITH KLAHEHN, Director of the Association of Defense Communities, Colorado Springs, Colorado, invited testimony for SB 185, stated he was the past chair of the Military Affairs Counsel. He said he currently serves as the Chair of the Defense Mission Task Force. As part of the Board of Directors for the

National Association of Defense Communities, he also leads a group of nearly 40 members twice a year to military defense events nationwide. He expressed his pride in the strong connections with Alaska, emphasizing its strategic importance globally. He acknowledged the Fairbanks North Star Borough for its recognition as one of ABC's Great American Defense Communities last year and highlighted the program's significant impact through grants for various projects and installations. There has been increasing pressure from the Department of Defense (DOD) on military communities to address issues related to quality of life, critical infrastructure, utilities, and other base concerns. Given the vast distances between military communities in Alaska, he opined that individual communities would struggle to handle significant financial pressures alone. The state is in need of a state-level organization to provide support in addressing these challenges. While each state approaches these issues differently, Alaska's unique geographical situation requires a coordinated effort at the state level to effectively address the needs of military communities. Since 2005, the last of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) worked hard to save their base. In light of recent news and issues impacting the nation, discussions have surfaced about the risk of foreign investments from bad actors. Military communities would face significant challenges if left to address these issues independently, so Alaska should be prepared on a state level. All facets of quality of life rely upon communities to help military bases. There have never been more federal resources to leverage in these efforts. He stated he strongly supports SB 185 and the good it represents to service members and their families. He expressed his belief that it is time for Alaska to step up and demonstrate its capabilities.

[3:45:33 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI expressed appreciation for his service and the service of his family stationed at Fort Wainwright.

[3:46:27 PM](#)

TAMMIE PERREAULT, Northwest Regional Liaison, Defense-State Liaison, Department of Defense (DOD), Defense-State Liaison Office, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, said the Defense-State Liaison Office works under the direction of military defense and policy. The Defense-State Liaison Office is dedicated to assisting communities in addressing issues and providing support to military families nationwide. States with structures similar to those proposed in SB 185 offer a centralized platform for discussing military concerns, with the

most successful models typically led by the executive branch. Considering the dispersed nature of Alaska's 21 thousand military personnel, having a unified statewide voice is particularly important. She noted that military issues often differ from those related to veterans.

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CHAIR KAWASAKI concluded invited testimony and opened public testimony on SB 185.

[3:49:11 PM](#)

SUSAN ALLMEROOTH, representing self, Two Rivers, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 185. She said while she understands the intent of SB 185, she has concerns about the bill's excessive overreach. Existing community services should take the lead in reaching out to leaders to determine necessary actions. She stated her belief that expanding the size of the executive branch is not necessarily the answer to budgetary issues. The words for the yellow highlight "civilian lives". SB 185 would establish a system that would allow the military branch to dictate civilian lives. She urged the committee to reject this legislation.

[3:50:29 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked whether there are any existing organizations that perform the same service.

[3:50:47 PM](#)

MS. ALLMEROOTH replied that when she was in the military, some places assisted with settling into town. Military members had sponsors who directed them to various local facilities for assistance. She said she primarily relies on services provided by Veteran's Affairs (VA).

[3:51:27 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI said he will strive to make improvements to SB 185 as it moves through the process.

[3:52:08 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI wondered whether the American Medical College Application Service Team (AMCAST), currently structured within DMVA, would be housed under the lieutenant governor and if that location is appropriate.

[3:52:43 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI closed public testimony on SB 185.

[3:52:59 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked why the Alaska Municipal League was not specifically named in SB 185, page 2, paragraph 4, as that is the organization it seems to reference.

[3:53:43 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI replied the intention was to develop the language in a way that includes any organization, now or into the future.

[3:54:20 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 185 in committee.

SB 223-ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL APPOINTMENT

[3:54:50 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 223 "An Act relating to the appointment of an assistant adjutant general; and providing for an effective date."

[3:55:22 PM](#)

CRAIG CHRISTENSON, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), Anchorage, Alaska, said SB 223 would change the requirement of five-year service in the Alaska National Guard for the assistant adjutant general positions to a preference. There are currently two positions that serve dual roles: one as the commander of the Army National Guard and a state-level director, and the other as the commander of the Air National Guard and a director. DMVA found it necessary to expand the selection pool for these appointments. By making the requirement a preference, it helps to widen the pool of potential candidates.

[3:56:46 PM](#)

ANGELA LAFLAMME, Legislative Liaison, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), Anchorage, Alaska, presented the sectional analysis for SB 223:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Sectional Analysis
Senate Bill 223 Assistant Adjutant General
Qualifications (33-GS2609\A)**

Section 1 amends AS 26.05.180(a) relating to headquarters staff of the Alaska National Guard regarding appointment and qualification of an assistant adjutant general by removing the requirement

for at least five years of service in the Alaska Army National Guard or Alaska Air National Guard and replacing it with language providing the Adjutant General flexibility when appointing an assistant adjutant general to provide a preference to a candidate with at least five years of service.

Section 2 establishes the effective date of this legislation.

[3:57:49 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked how many years the five-year requirement has been in place.

[3:58:07 PM](#)

MR. CHRISTENSON offered to return to the committee with further information. He stated his belief that it could have been a decade or two.

[3:58:26 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI commented that it seems likes people with service in the Alaska National Guard and Air National Guard should receive preference over candidates from other states and others without experience.

[3:58:51 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI concurred, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing candidates with Alaska training or experience with the Alaska National Guard.

[3:59:32 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN stated the last time AS 06.26.05.180 was last amended in 1973, so the 5-year requirement has existed for at least 50 years.

[4:00:14 PM](#)

MR. CHRISTENSON replied that in the Army National Guard, a person is selected based on eligibility for O-7. Currently, there are twelve positions for O-6, including some in medical and non-combat roles which limits the applicant pool to four guardsmen. He noted that some individuals are newly promoted, while others may be considering retirement. Transitioning from the position of Active Guard Reserve to the Assistant Adjutant General means becoming a state employee and a part-time guardsman, resulting in a significant pay reduction of \$80 to \$90 thousand dollars. While preference is given to those with Alaska National Guard experience, widening the candidate pool is

necessary due to individuals with diverse career plans and potential candidates from other states who have worked at National Guard bureaus. However, the selection must prioritize the right fit for the role.

[4:03:02 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked if the National Guard has experienced issues filling the positions in the past 50 years.

[4:03:22 PM](#)

MR. CHRISTENSON said DMVA is unable to fill the currently vacant position.

[4:03:30 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked whether the position of Assistant Adjutant General could legally be filled by a U.S. Air Force colonel, or higher, stationed in Alaska.

[4:04:08 PM](#)

MR. CHRISTENSON replied that a candidate could not be brought on as an Assistant Adjutant General unless they had five years of experience with the Alaska National Guard.

[4:04:20 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked whether individuals with 20 years of experience in the federal Air Force or Army would still be required to serve five years in the Alaska National Guard to be considered.

[4:04:29 PM](#)

MR. CHRISTENSON replied that is correct.

[4:04:38 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked if Alaskan residency is required for eligibility.

[4:04:58 PM](#)

MS. LAFLAMME replied that statute does not dictate that, and the qualifications for the position of state director would be consistent with those of any other state director. She stated her belief that employment with the state of Alaska would require residency.

[4:05:23 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI suggested that more research may be needed.

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SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked how many people are currently eligible for the open position.

[4:05:46 PM](#)

MR. CHRISTENSON stated his belief that currently no one, but he would contact personnel and report back to the committee.

[4:06:02 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked whether someone with no National Guard experience but has 20 years of experience with the U.S. Air Force and their last five years served in Alaska, could the National Guard hire them as the assistant under the proposed changes.

[4:06:34 PM](#)

MS. LAFLAMME replied yes and said a candidate with qualified military and background experience could meet federal requirements without having five years of service with the Alaska National Guard.

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CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 223; hearing none, he closed public testimony.

[4:07:12 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI said he recently met General Wilkins, a one-star general from the 11th Airborne as well as a guardsman for the Montana National Guard. He requested written clarification on residency requirements.

[4:07:44 PM](#)

MS. LAFLAMME said in active military, a candidate could still be a resident in their home state and be stationed in Alaska. She said she is uncertain how the Montana National Guard compares, specifically if a candidate follows Title 10 orders with the National Guard to serve as a commander in Alaska. That individual could be on active duty while still being a member of the National Guard.

[4:08:16 PM](#)

SENATOR MERRICK wondered why anyone would want to take a huge pay cut to get this promotion.

[4:08:35 PM](#)

MR. CHRISTENSON said many people in the military strive to advance to higher levels of leadership. He stated that reaching the top leadership positions in the National Guard, such as

commander of the Army or Air Force, represents a promotion to the rank of general officer. From there, they could become the Adjutant General or pursue other positions within the National Guard bureau in Washington D.C. It could be driven by a career shift, patriotism, or a professional goal.

[4:09:23 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked how it is possible there are no federally recognized field-grade commissioned officers with five years' experience.

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MR. CHRISTENSON replied that according to statute, the position requires a field-grade officer, which would mean major, lieutenant colonel, or colonel. Under federal regulations, the individual would need to be eligible for a promotion to the O-7 rank, which means an O-6 general officer. While there are many field grade officers, O-6 positions are voluntary. There are currently no individuals who have met the requirements for promotion to that board. Those who have met the requirements may be among those considering retirement.

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SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI expressed that he is uncomfortable with allowing an out-of-state individual who has never stepped foot in Alaska to fill this position. He opined that SB 223 opens it up to that possibility and asked if that could occur under this bill.

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MR. CHRISTENSON replied it is technically possible. However, the hiring for this position is taken seriously and requires highly qualified candidates. He expressed confidence that it is unlikely for someone who has never been to Alaska to fill the role.

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MS. LAFLAMME added that "the statute for hiring an appointment of adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard has this preference. So, theoretically that could be the same situation that we find ourselves in right now under the current statute and it makes it very difficult for hiring the next level to potential replace the assistant or the adjutant general with an assistant adjutant general to have those strict qualification there and it be open at the higher level."

[4:12:31 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked if she would consider an amendment to require five years of Alaska residency.

[4:12:45 PM](#)

MS. LAFLAMME replied that her only concern is if someone were in active military in Alaska for only three years, it would disqualify them for the position unless they changed their residency prior to leaving active service.

[4:13:18 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked whether an adjutant general must have residency in Alaska.

[4:13:31 PM](#)

MS. LAFLAMME replied that the position appointed by the governor adheres to the same requirements as any other commissioner. A candidate must have military service and be federally recognized as a general grade officer to hold that position. Other than the federal requirements, they would have to meet the same requirements to be appointed as the executive principal of the department.

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CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting.

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SENATOR CLAMAN quoted AS 26.05.160 (a), "To be eligible for appointment as adjutant general, a person must be a citizen of the state and must be a federally recognized general-grade officer in the Alaska National Guard or an officer who has the qualifications to gain federal recognition." He said the provision about citizens of the state is not in AS 26.05.180.

[4:15:03 PM](#)

SENATOR MERRICK asked if there is a definition for citizen of Alaska.

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SENATOR CLAMAN replied [undiscernible]

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CHAIR KAWASAKI asked whether the assistant adjutant general ascends to the position of adjutant general if the position becomes vacant.

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MR. CHRISTENSON replied not necessarily. He said while the governor may consider the assistant adjutant general when the position of adjutant general becomes vacant, it is not guaranteed.

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CHAIR KAWASAKI commented that as head of the agency for DMVA, the adjutant general position is subject to legislative confirmation.

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CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 223 in committee.

[4:17:05 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Kawasaki adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 4:17 p.m.