

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 3, 2025

3:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Cathy Giessel, Chair  
Senator Bill Wielechowski, Vice Chair  
Senator Matt Claman  
Senator Forrest Dunbar  
Senator Scott Kawasaki  
Senator Shelley Hughes  
Senator Robert Myers

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 29

"An Act relating to an executive administrator for the Big Game Commercial Services Board."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 30

"An Act making certain veterans eligible for a lifetime permit to access state park campsites and the parking and restrooms of developed facilities without charge; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 29

SHORT TITLE: BIG GAME COMMERCIAL SERVICES BOARD

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) BJORKMAN

01/10/25	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(S)	RES, FIN
02/03/25	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 30

SHORT TITLE: STATE PARK PERMITS FOR DISABLED VETERANS

SPONSOR(s) : SENATOR(s) BJORKMAN

01/10/25 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25  
01/22/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/22/25 (S) RES, FIN  
02/03/25 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

**WITNESS REGISTER**

SENATOR JESSE BJORKMAN, District D  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Sponsor of SB 29.

SAVAYA BIEBER, Staff  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the sectional analysis for SB 29, version A.

JASON BUNCH, representing self  
Kodiak, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified by invitation on SB 29

MIKE FLORES, Co-Chair, Big Game Commercial Services Board,  
Soldotna, Alaska,

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified by invitation on SB 29.

SYLVAN ROBB, Director  
Division of Corporations  
Business and Professional Licensing  
Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions on SB 29.

SENATOR JESSE BJORKMAN, District D  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Sponsor of SB 30.

MATTHEW CHURCHILL, Staff  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the sectional analysis for SB 30, version I.

RICKY GEASE, Director  
Division of Parks and Recreation  
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions on SB 30.

BOB PAWLOWSKI  
Representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 30.

PHILLIP HOKENSON  
Representing self  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 30.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:30:55 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Dunbar, Myers, Claman, Kawasaki and Chair Giessel. Senator Hughes arrived immediately thereafter, and Senator Wielechowski arrived during the course of the meeting.

#### **SB 29-BIG GAME COMMERCIAL SERVICES BOARD**

[3:31:41 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 29 "An Act relating to an executive administrator for the Big Game Commercial Services Board."

[3:32:13 PM](#)

SENATOR JESSE BJORKMAN, District D, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska paraphrased the sponsor statement for SB 29, version A:

[Original punctuation provided.]

#### **SB 29 Big Game Commercial Services Board Version A Sponsor Statement**

Senate Bill 29 secures the executive administrator position to the Big Game Commercial Services Board in statute. This position is paid for by guide licensing fees and has been requested by the Big Game Commercial Services Board to make their work more efficient and cost effective. Guiding has many complex regulations.

Designating a temporary position to concentrate on licensing functions, examinations and investigations is current practice and it is working well. Securing this position in statute adds assurance to the continuation of this effective process.

The Big Game Commercial Services Board plays an important role in the management of commercial game hunters in the interest of the State's wildlife resources. They fulfill this role by managing all hunting guide licensing functions, administering board meetings, assisting the board with maintaining and writing 29 written and practical exams, generating reports, and assisting Department of Commerce Community and Economic Development's Investigative Services and Department of Public Safety in game investigations.

New licensing examiners require extensive training, and with board members only serving 4 years, it seems like they depart as soon as they are up to speed. This has led to administrative errors that were highlighted in the recent audit of the Board. The Board was previously sharing an executive administrator with the Board of Marine Pilots to help address the workload. While this helped, the two boards were too complex. As a result, a temporary position was created in the FY24 and FY25 budgets to add this executive administrator using Designated General Funds paid for by guide licensing fees. This bill would continue using the same funding source and codify this position and its range into statute.

Please contact Savaya (465-2615) with any questions or comments related to this bill.

SENATOR BJORKMAN said Mike Flores, current vice chair of the Big Game Commercial Services Board, and Jason Bunch, the previous Big Game Commercial Services Board chair were available online to answer questions.

[3:34:32 PM](#)

SAVAYA BIEBER, Staff, Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 29, version A:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**SB 29 Big Game Commercial Services Board Version A  
Sectional Analysis**

**Section 1:** Amends AS 08.54.591 by adding a new subsection that would require the department employ an executive administrator to support the Big Game Commercial Services Board.

**Section 2:** Amends AS 08.54.600(a) to require the board to establish the qualifications and duties of the board's executive administrator.

**Section 3:** Amends AS 39.25.120(c) by adding the principle executive administrator for the board to the list of employees in the partially exempt service.

[3:35:22 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR noted that similar legislation was introduced during past sessions. He asked whether there were significant changes to this version.

[3:35:33 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN said SB 29 was identical to the bill introduced [in 2024].

[3:35:42 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI noted the 2023 audit report did not call for a board administrator. He asked what justified the position.

[3:36:05 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN said the [Big Game Commercial Services] Board requested the position. The position was also recommended by the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED) to assist the board in its work and accuracy. He suggested that Director Robb, DCCED Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing could better explain.

[3:36:32 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI noted that in its 2023 audit report [page 9], the board concluded that [license] fees would be lowered because of the budget surplus of over \$850,000 with the goal of reaching net zero for the board's operations. He asked for board members' comments.

[3:37:06 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL affirmed the concept of an executive director considering the complex issues dealt with by the board. She referred to page 10 of the audit report and noted that the [Big

Game Commercial Services] Board concluded [the \$850,000 surplus] would be adequate to support an executive director.

[3:38:12 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN deferred the question to the [Big Game Commercial Services] Board to ascertain the board's intent. He noted that the money the guide board requested to spend [for an administrator] came from administrative fees. He said the board had a high desire to perform their licensing functions accurately. Guides must demonstrate extensive knowledge of Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) regulations, as well as other specific expertise. He said a dedicated staff person to assist the board with their licensing function was the board's desire.

[3:39:05 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN noted that despite constitutional provisions about no dedicated funds, this was a dedicated fund.

[3:39:29 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN argued that the funds were not dedicated, rather they were designated. He said the money was from license fees paid by guides to regulate their industry and their licenses.

[3:39:45 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN clarified that this was not a pre-statehood fish and game licensing fee that could be dedicated, but because it came up after statehood, could be designated, but not dedicated.

[3:39:59 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN concurred.

SENATOR CLAMAN explained that it was his intent to be sure the legislators agreed [about the nature of the fees] because it can be confusing.

[3:40:13 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL clarified further that this was not a Fish and Game fee, but was a licensing fee, paid by the licensee. She compared it to fees paid by medical professionals to the boards that regulate those professions. She reiterated that it was not a [Alaska Department of] Fish and Game (ADF&G) fee.

[3:40:44 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN also further clarified that these fees were distinct from the fees that would be paid to get a hunting

license. He said a hunting license was a dedicated fee and these fees were unrelated.

[3:41:09 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL said a fee to hunt a bear was paid to ADF&G; the fees paid to a board to regulate the guides was completely different.

CHAIR GIESSEL announced invited testimony on SB 29.

[3:41:54 PM](#)

JASON BUNCH, representing self, Kodiak, Alaska testified by invitation on SB 29. He introduced himself as a former member of the Big Game Commercial Services Board, serving from 2018 to 2024, with the last three years as board chair.

MR. BUNCH testified about the need for an Executive Administrator (EA) position to improve the efficiency of the Big Game Commercial Services Board's licensing program. He highlighted the identification of efficiency errors in the administration of the licensing program six years ago and described the efforts of the board to improve communication with Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED) licensing examiners. He noted the high turnover rate of the licensing examiners and said the administrative burden for the board was too high. A shared EA position with the Board of Marine Pilots was a temporary solution, but the two boards' needs often conflicted. Bunch noted that licensees were willing to fund the EA if it ensured better administration, but the board could not afford the position without raising fees.

[3:45:04 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS asked whether there were any ideas to encourage board members to serve longer than one four-year term.

[3:45:25 PM](#)

MR. BUNCH noted that he served part of a term when a former board member vacated their position and then a full term. Recent public members have all served two terms and the guide member is beginning his second term. Retaining members has improved, and members learn a lot and often find they enjoy serving; but finding new board members is a challenge. He highlighted the importance of finding new members who have a passion for wildlife and understand the value guiding brings to the state of Alaska.

[3:48:06 PM](#)

MIKE FLORES, Co-Chair, Big Game Commercial Services Board, Soldotna, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 29. He emphasized the importance of Senate Bill 29 for the long-term stability of the Big Game Commercial Services Board, highlighting the complexity of the executive director's role and the time required to become effective. He said the board faced a high workload, managing over 20 people on probation, more than 50 open cases, and a significant number of new guides needing testing. Additionally, he noted numerous regulatory proposals in process.

MR. FLORES concluded that SB 29 would support the long-term stability and health of the board by providing leadership support equipped to meet the board's complexity.

[3:50:04 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL noted that the audit review only extended the board for six years, two years less than the eight-year statutory maximum. The review concluded that board licenses were not consistently supported by adequate documentation, and two private landowner board seats were vacant or had absences for extended periods. She said the commissioner's response to the audit was to recommend the board consider whether two private landowner board seats continue to be necessary for effective regulation. She asked for the board's position on that recommendation.

[3:51:02 PM](#)

MR. FLORES said the board considered possible options and concluded that more participation was better. He said finding people to fill board positions was difficult and it was preferable to fill the positions with guides or transporters or public members if it was not possible to fill them with landowners over leaving the positions vacant.

[3:51:52 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL concluded invited testimony on SB 29.

[3:52:00 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES referred to the 2023 audit report and noted that the Big Game Commercial Services Board oversaw 1,438 active licenses, had 409 open cases and met about five times annually. She asked whether this workload was typical for boards with executive directors and asked that it be compared to other boards.

[3:53:05 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN noted Director Robb was available to answer questions relating to boards.

[3:53:35 PM](#)

SYLVAN ROBB, Director, Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing, Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, Juneau, Alaska, answered that there were six comparable boards with executive directors including the Big Game Commercial Services Board. She said the number of licensees varied among these boards, but complexity and workload were significant factors. She noted that Big Game Commercial Services Board included 26 guide management unit exams and three exams for registered guide outfitters as well as jurisprudence exams for transporters and class A guides, indicating the extensive work involved in the program.

MS. ROBB said the Board of Nursing was not a good comparison due to its large size, with 32,000 licensees. Boards with similar numbers of licensees and executive administrators included the Board of Public Accountancy.

MS. ROBB provided an update on the rapid growth of the guiding profession, noting that the number of licensees increased from the audit period to the end of fiscal year 2024 to 1,746 licensees.

[3:55:28 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES emphasized the significant growth. She wondered why the governor did not bring forth the bill and asked whether the executive branch supported it.

[3:56:05 PM](#)

MS. ROBB said the bill, the Executive Director (ED) position and the funding for it were supported by the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED) for the fiscal year 2024 budget. She said the position was created as a temporary, exempt position and was currently filled. She could not speak to the position of the governor on SB 29.

[3:56:36 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES referred to the audit and the 2023 reduction of fees. She asked whether the fees would go back up to create the Executive Order position.

[3:57:18 PM](#)

MS. ROBB affirmed that the fees were reduced. She referred to AS 08.01.065, which mandates setting fees to cover the cost of regulating the profession. She acknowledged uncertainty in

predicting the number of new licensees and renewals, which, she said, affects the fee-setting process. She said the goal was not to achieve a zero surplus, as investigations are an inherent part of the fee-setting equation and investigation costs are unpredictable, including expensive cases that reached the state Supreme Court.

[3:58:44 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI expressed surprise that only six boards had executive directors and asked which boards they were.

[3:59:10 PM](#)

MS. ROBB answered:

- the State Medical Board
- the Board of Nursing
- the Board of Pharmacy
- Board of Registration for Architects, Engineers and Land Surveyors
- the Board of Public Accountancy
- the Real Estate Commission
- the Board of Marine Pilots (Marine Pilot Coordinator)

[3:59:37 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked how other boards manage administrative functions without executive directors.

[4:00:00 PM](#)

MS. ROBB said DCCED oversaw 21 regulatory boards. She said the Board of Nursing, for instance, had a team of 13 to manage 32,000 licensees. Smaller boards had fewer members, making coordination easier. The complexity of licensing work varied, with some boards requiring more frequent interaction with licensees. She emphasized that the Big Game Commercial Services Board had many documents, and it required licensees to submit hunt reports after every hunt and activity reports after each transport. She said the frequent interaction with licensees generated a significant amount of work.

[4:01:57 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN emphasized the number of active licensees and noted the 20 percent plus increase over 2023. He asked whether there was an explanation for the increase and if it indicated a trend that was expected to continue.

[4:02:27 PM](#)

MS. ROBB said there were a number of professions for which DCCED had seen increases. She deferred to the board members for possible industry-related explanations.

[4:02:51 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN affirmed his interest, noting that other areas of the economy were not demonstrating increases.

[4:03:10 PM](#)

MS. ROBB offered to follow up with answers for the committee.

[4:03:29 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL noted there was no fiscal note with the documents for SB 29. She asked whether DCCED had a fiscal note for SB 29.

[4:04:13 PM](#)

MS. ROBB said there was a fiscal note for \$194,800 for the executive director position. She clarified that the fiscal note reflected an increase of about \$54,000 per year.

[4:04:41 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL said the fiscal note Ms. Robb referred to was for SB 248 and so would not coincide to SB 29. She anticipated a new fiscal note for SB 29.

[4:04:56 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL applauded the Big Game Commercial Services Board for overcoming a \$1 million deficit over the past ten or twelve years.

[4:05:47 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN expressed gratitude for the opportunity to present SB 29. He reiterated that SB 29 was supported by the guides who were willing to fund it through their licensing fees. He said the goal of SB 29 was to ensure that Alaska's Big Game Guides can provide safe, enjoyable and successful hunting experiences.

[4:06:46 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL held SB 29 in committee.

### **SB 30-STATE PARK PERMITS FOR DISABLED VETERANS**

[4:07:08 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 30 "An Act making certain veterans eligible for a lifetime permit to access state park campsites and the parking and restrooms of

developed facilities without charge; and providing for an effective date."

[4:07:15 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESEL solicited a motion.

[4:07:25 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN moved to adopt Committee Substitute (CS) for SB 30, work order 34-LS0293\I, as the working document.

[4:07:37 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL objected for purposes of discussion and invited Senator Bjorkman to explain the changes to SB 30.

[4:07:47 PM](#)

SENATOR JESSE BJORKMAN, District D, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska said [CSSB 30] incorporated clarifying language resulting from working with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Parks.

[4:08:17 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN offered an overview of SB 30 and paraphrased the sponsor statement for version I:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**SB 30 State Park Permits for Disabled Veterans  
Version I Sponsor Statement**

Senate Bill 30 would allow disabled veterans who have honorably served our country to have a free lifetime permit to Alaska State Parks. The permit will provide access to developed campsites, parking areas, and restrooms.

Currently under statute, disabled veterans qualify for a free annual permit that must be reapplied for each year. By changing the term of the permit to a lifetime pass, it will be easier for disabled veterans to take advantage of this opportunity. In addition, the annual permit does not currently allow for free parking at Alaska State Parks. By including parking, disabled veterans will have greater access to the benefits provided by our parks.

I believe that those who have served their nation in the military deserve the utmost respect and have earned the right to enjoy the beauty of our great

state that they have defended and sacrificed for. I respectfully ask for your support of this legislation for the benefit of our disabled veterans.

SENATOR BJORKMAN said he invited Captain Bob Pawlowski, serving on the Alaska Pioneer Home Advisory Board and active in the AARP Alaska Veterans' program as well as Phil Hokenson, chair of the Alaska Veterans Advisory Council to provide testimony.

[4:10:07 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL removed her objection; found no further objection and CSSB 30 was adopted as the working document.

[4:10:26 PM](#)

MATTHEW CHURCHILL, Staff, Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 30, version I:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**SB 30 State Park Permits for Disabled Veterans  
Version I Sectional Analysis**

Section 1: Amends AS 41.21.026(d) to change the permit that allows disabled veterans free use of campsites, parking areas, and restrooms from an annual permit to a lifetime permit. Permits will be renewed automatically every five years with the permit holder's current address.

Section 2: Defines disabled veteran as one who was disabled in the line of duty.

Section 3: Provides for an effective date of January 1, 2026.

[4:11:09 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES said she received a suggestion to consider a card rather than a sticker. This would permit the receiving veteran to access the parks without limiting access to a specific vehicle. She noted the correspondent provided other suggestions as well.

[4:11:52 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN affirmed that he had received that suggestion, and he was open to considerations and ideas. He said a card and other possibilities for conveying the intended privilege to

veterans and preventing fraud could be considered. He noted that a pass [sticker] on a vehicle was just one possible way.

[4:12:53 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES declared a conflict of interest due to her husband's disabled veteran status and the possibility that she could benefit from SB 30. She asked whether SB 30 applied to a specific range [or degree] of disability.

[4:13:30 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN said the intent was to apply SB 30 for veterans who are 50 percent disabled. This is in line with the standard held by Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation for the current free camping pass [for disabled veterans].

[4:14:02 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR declared a conflict of interest due to his own veterans' disability status and the possibility that he would benefit from SB 30.

[4:14:39 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR shared his concern about "leakage," meaning that people other than those for whom the benefit was intended take advantage of it, imposing a significant expense for the state park system. He related a similar "leakage" example: property tax audits in Anchorage revealed inappropriate senior tax exemptions and disabled veteran exemptions. He noted that this was often unintended, for example, when a veteran passed away and property transferred to someone else.

[4:15:26 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR noted that a vehicle was commonly the means of accessing state parks and asked for input from DNR regarding the practicality of a card versus a sticker. He asked whether DNR issued one pass for one vehicle or passes for multiple cars to each recipient. He also suggested that applicant veterans be required to submit resident addresses rather than mailing addresses.

[4:16:55 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL suggested Mr. Gease from DNR would be able to answer questions.

[4:17:00 PM](#)

RICKY GEASE, Director, Division of Parks and Recreation, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Anchorage, Alaska, said the current system for the disabled veteran camping pass was to

issue a vehicle sticker to each qualified applicant. A second sticker would be issued for parking under SB 30. Additional stickers for both programs could be issued for additional vehicles. He said a hanging placard like the handicapped placard system could be considered, allowing the pass to be transferred between vehicles.

[4:18:27 PM](#)

MR. GEASE offered the following points for consideration:

- Less than seven percent of disabled veterans camping pass participants come from out of state.
- The current [camping] system includes a five-year pass valid from 2023 to 2027.
- Approximately 2,400 disabled veterans currently have the five-year [camping] pass.
- There are about 17,000 disabled veterans who qualify for the camping pass.
- Estimates suggest that around 5000 veterans in-state would be interested in the parking pass.

[4:19:41 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL restated Senator Dunbar's question about mailing address versus resident address.

[4:19:51 PM](#)

MR. GEASE said a mailing address was necessary to get the pass stickers to recipients. DNR could also collect resident addresses, however, a veteran's disability status was what made them eligible for the pass, not their residency. He said there were veterans who come from out of Alaska to use the disabled veteran pass. He said a residency requirement could be added for the parking pass [SB 30], but that is not a requirement for the camping pass.

[4:20:48 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES noted comments about the difficulty of applying for the passes. She asked where applicants could go to apply; whether there were provisions for rural residents and how long it would take to for DNR to respond to applications.

[4:21:21 PM](#)

MR. GEASE explained that DNR completed the initial review of [applicant] documents at the public information centers in Anchorage or Fairbanks. He said follow-up and renewal could be done through the mail. Applicants outside Anchorage and Fairbanks can contact DNR to complete the paperwork.

[4:21:59 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked how long the process took, particularly when it involved mailing things back and forth.

[4:22:10 PM](#)

MR. GEASE said follow-up by DNR was usually quick and the time [delay] element was mail delivery.

[4:22:40 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL restated Senator Dunbar's question about the definition of qualifying disability. She noted that the sponsor of SB 30 said 50 percent disability was the standard and she asked for verification and documentation.

[4:23:16 PM](#)

MR. GEASE offered to follow up to provide the committee and the sponsor with the language DNR used to evaluate eligibility.

[4:23:40 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced invited testimony on SB 30.

[4:23:55 PM](#)

BOB PAWLOWSKI, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 30. He read from the following written testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Senator Giessel, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of Senate Bill 30, State Park Permits for Disabled Veterans. I am Captain Bob Pawlowski, NOAA (Ret) and a VA Beneficiary.

Currently I serve as the Chair, Alaska Pioneer Homes Advisory Board, a board that advises the Governor on our Pioneer Homes, including the Alaska State Veterans and Pioneer Home in Palmer. I also serve on the Alaska Commission on Aging, where I personally focus on our aging Veteran population, of which 30 percent are of the Vietnam Era, which ended 50 years ago. This is a good bill in it offers an opportunity for our disabled Veterans to fully utilize Alaska's State Parks, versus just camping without charge. This is particularly valuable to those disabled seniors who, with age, have had to decrease their camping given the challenges of

setting up and taking down a camp. This bill affords them the opportunity to continue to visit our State Parks and enjoy the amenities, ease of access, and outdoor activities on a daily basis that for decades they have enjoyed under their camping permit.

Let me share a personal example of how it will help. Since 2015, I have volunteered and participated in Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing - Alaska, a therapeutic program for disabled Vets that teaches fly tying, rod building and fly fishing with a group of their peers. Through camaraderie and focus on the fine motor and mental skills in tying flies and building rods, they find new ways to meet their challenges. And, when they are out together with other disabled Vets, catching their first fish on their own fly on their own rod, you see their pride and the value of the program. And this is but one of many programs in Alaska that are helping our disabled Vets adapt and heal by being outdoors.

By offering no charge access to our state parks for Alaska's disabled Vets, you are enabling them to take more time to be outdoors and enjoy the Alaska they have chosen to live and grow old in.

Thank you. I am free to answer any questions.

(Captain Bob Pawlowski, NOAA (Ret) has been active in military and veteran issues since moving permanently to Alaska. He remains active with the Military Officers Association of America, the Navy League of the United States, and most recently on the AARP Alaska Veteran Program. He lives in Anchorage with his wife Paula.)

4:27:49 PM

PHILLIP HOKENSON, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, Testified in support of SB 30. He paraphrased the following letter of support:

[Original punctuation included.]

Senator Giessel, members of the Committee:  
I'm grateful for the opportunity to voice support for SB 30, State Park Permits for Disabled Veterans. My name is Phil Hokenson and I'm an Army veteran from Fairbanks. I serve as the Chair of the Alaska

Veterans Advisory Council and a member Alaska Pioneer Home Advisory Board.

Alaska is often heralded for being home to the highest per capita population of Veterans—we also have the youngest veteran population and the highest percentage of women veterans. But why do so many veterans choose to relocate to or stay in Alaska once they hang up their uniform? One reason is that this state is among the best in the country at supporting our veterans and acknowledging the value that military veterans bring to our communities. And that's not only through education dollars at the University of Alaska or healthcare dollars through the VA's community care program or the dollars that military retirees and disabled veterans spend in our economy, we also recognize the value they bring as citizens who have stood up on behalf of their country and who often continue to serve in many different ways.

While Alaska is a national leader in supporting veterans in many ways, one place we fall short of a standard that was set by the National Defense Authorization Act of 2022 is in providing veterans with expanded access to the state's parks. That [National Defense Authorization Act] (NDAA) established free, lifetime access to national parks for all military veterans. With SB 30, we have the opportunity to bring the state closer to that benchmark by offering free, lifetime state park permits to disabled veterans.

Providing disabled veterans with this access not only honors their service but also supports their well-being by offering them a greater opportunity to enjoy the pristine wilderness of the Last Frontier and connect with the land they defended on our behalf. I urge you to pass SB 30 to continue strengthening Alaska's reputation as a state that values and supports our veterans to the utmost.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

[4:31:02 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL concluded invited testimony on SB 30.

[4:31:34 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL held SB 30 in committee.

[4:31:48 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN thanked the committee for hearing SB 30 and considering the opportunity to honor disabled veterans by

providing them with free parking passes to the state parks and to smooth the renewal process. He advocated for continuing the current [camping] sticker system and advocated for a second sticker to be issued for parking. He reiterated his openness to ideas for SB 30.

4:32:40 PM

CHAIR GIESSEL anticipated the provision of a definition and documentation for "disabled" by DNR.

4:33:34 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Giessel adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting at 4:33 p.m.