

1 IN THE SENATE

BY PALMER

2 SENATE BILL NO. 13

3 IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

4 SEVENTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

5 A BILL

6 For an Act entitled: "An Act creating the office of ombudsman; and pro-
7 viding for an effective date."

8 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

9 * Section 1. AS 24 is amended by adding a new chapter to read:

10 CHAPTER 55. OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN.

11 ARTICLE 1. ORGANIZATION.

12 Sec. 24.55.010. OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN. There is created in
13 the legislative branch of the state the office of ombudsman.

14 Sec. 24.55.020. APPOINTMENT OF THE OMBUDSMAN. (a) A candidate
15 for appointment as the ombudsman shall be selected by the ombudsman
16 selection committee composed of the president of the senate and a
17 minority member of the senate appointed by him, the speaker of the
18 house and a minority member of the house of representatives appointed
19 by him, the chairman of the senate judiciary committee and the chairman
20 of the house judiciary committee.

21 (b) The ombudsman selection committee shall examine persons to
22 serve as ombudsman regarding their qualifications and ability and shall
23 place the name of the person selected in nomination before the legis-
24 lature for appointment as the ombudsman. The appointment of a person
25 nominated as the ombudsman by the committee is effective if his
26 candidacy is approved by a two-thirds majority of the members of the
27 legislature in joint session.

28 Sec. 24.55.030. QUALIFICATIONS. No person may serve as ombudsman

29 (1) while he is a candidate for or holds any other national

1 or state office;

2 (2) within one year of the last day on which he served as
3 a member of the legislature; or

4 (3) while he is engaged in any other regular occupation for
5 which he receives compensation.

6 Sec. 24.55.040. TERM OF OFFICE. The term of office of the
7 ombudsman is six years.

8 Sec. 24.55.050. REMOVAL. The legislature, by a two-thirds vote
9 in each house, may remove or suspend the ombudsman from office, but
10 only for neglect of duty, misconduct, or disability.

11 Sec. 24.55.060. COMPENSATION. The ombudsman is entitled to an
12 annual salary equal to that of a superior court judge.

13 Sec. 24.55.070. STAFF AND DELEGATION. (a) The ombudsman may
14 appoint assistants and clerical personnel necessary to carry out the
15 provisions of this chapter.

16 (b) The ombudsman may delegate to his assistants any of his
17 duties except those specified in secs. 190 and 200 of this chapter.

18 (c) The ombudsman and the staff appointed by him are in the
19 exempt service under AS 39.25.110.

20 Sec. 24.55.080. OFFICE FACILITIES AND ADMINISTRATION. (a) The
21 Department of Administration shall provide suitable office space and
22 equipment for the ombudsman and his staff.

23 (b) The salary of the ombudsman and his staff shall be paid
24 through the same procedures used for the payment of the salaries of
25 other state employees.

26 (c) The ombudsman shall submit a budget for each fiscal year to
27 the finance committees of the legislature and shall annually submit an
28 estimated budget to the governor for information purposes in the
29 preparation of the executive budget.

1 Sec. 24.55.090. PROCEDURE. The ombudsman may establish procedures
2 for receiving and processing complaints, conducting investigations, and
3 reporting his findings. However, he may not levy fees for the submission
4 or investigation of complaints.

5 ARTICLE 2. JURISDICTION AND INITIATION OF INVESTIGATIONS.

6 Sec. 24.55.100. JURISDICTION. (a) The ombudsman has jurisdiction
7 to investigate the administrative acts of agencies.

8 (b) The ombudsman may exercise his powers without regard to the
9 finality of any administrative act.

10 Sec. 24.55.110. INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS. The ombudsman shall
11 investigate any complaint indicating an appropriate subject for investi-
12 gation under sec. 150 of this chapter, unless he believes that

13 (1) there is presently available an adequate remedy for
14 the grievance stated in the complaint;

15 (2) the complaint relates to a matter that is outside the
16 jurisdiction of the ombudsman;

17 (3) the complaint relates to an administrative act of which
18 the complainant has had knowledge for too long a time before the
19 complaint was submitted;

20 (4) the complainant does not have a sufficient personal
21 interest in the subject matter of the complaint;

22 (5) the complaint is trivial or made in bad faith; or

23 (6) the facilities of the ombudsman's office are insufficient
24 for adequate investigation.

25 Sec. 24.55.120. INVESTIGATION ON THE OMBUDSMAN'S MOTION. The
26 ombudsman may investigate on his own motion if he reasonably believes
27 that an appropriate subject for investigation under sec. 150 of this
28 chapter exists.

29 Sec. 24.55.130. NOTICE TO COMPLAINANT. (a) If the ombudsman

1 decides not to investigate, he shall inform the complainant of that
2 decision and shall state his reasons unless he reasonably believes it
3 is inappropriate to do so.

4 (b) If the ombudsman decides to investigate, he shall notify
5 the complainant of his decision.

6 Sec. 24.55.140. NOTICE TO THE AGENCY. If the ombudsman decides
7 to investigate, he shall notify the agency of his intention to investi-
8 gate.

9 ARTICLE 3. INVESTIGATIONS.

10 Sec. 24.55.150. APPROPRIATE SUBJECTS FOR INVESTIGATION. (a) An
11 appropriate subject for investigation by the ombudsman is an administra-
12 tive act of an agency which might be

- 13 (1) contrary to law;
14 (2) unreasonable, unfair, oppressive, or unnecessarily
15 discriminatory, even though in accordance with law;
16 (3) based on a mistake of fact;
17 (4) based on improper or irrelevant grounds;
18 (5) unaccompanied by an adequate statement of reasons;
19 (6) performed in an inefficient manner; or
20 (7) otherwise erroneous.

21 (b) The ombudsman may investigate to find an appropriate remedy.

22 Sec. 24.55.160. INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES. In an investigation,
23 the ombudsman may

- 24 (1) make inquiries and obtain information as he thinks fit;
25 (2) enter without notice to inspect the premises of an
26 agency;
27 (3) hold private hearings.

28 Sec. 24.55.170. POWERS. (a) Subject to the privileges which
29 witnesses have in the courts of this state, the ombudsman may

1 (1) compel at a specified time and place, by subpoena, the
2 appearance and sworn testimony of any person who the ombudsman reason-
3 ably believes may be able to give information relating to a matter
4 under investigation;

5 (2) compel any person, by subpoena, to produce documents,
6 papers, or objects which the ombudsman reasonably believes may relate
7 to a matter under investigation.

8 (b) If a person refuses to comply with a subpoena issued under
9 (a) of this section, the superior court may, on application of the
10 ombudsman, compel obedience by proceedings for contempt in the same
11 manner as in the case of disobedience to the requirements of a subpoena
12 issued by the court or refusal to testify in the court.

13 ARTICLE 4. PROCEDURE AND REPORTS AFTER INVESTIGATION.

14 Sec. 24.55.180. CONSULTATION WITH AGENCY. Before giving an
15 opinion or recommendation that is critical of an agency or person, the
16 ombudsman shall consult with that agency or person.

17 Sec. 24.55.190. PROCEDURE AFTER INVESTIGATION. (a) The ombudsman
18 shall report his opinion and recommendations to an agency if he finds,
19 after investigation, that

- 20 (1) a matter should be further considered by the agency;
21 (2) an administrative act should be modified or cancelled;
22 (3) a statute or regulation on which an administrative act
23 is based should be altered;
24 (4) reasons should be given for an administrative act; or
25 (5) any other action should be taken by the agency.

26 (b) The ombudsman may require the agency to notify him, within
27 a specified time, of any action taken on his recommendations.

28 Sec. 24.55.200. PRESENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS. After a
29 reasonable time has elapsed, the ombudsman shall present his opinion

1 and recommendations in writing to the governor. If the situation is
2 not remedied within a reasonable time, the ombudsman shall submit his
3 opinion and recommendations in writing to the members of the legislature.
4 The ombudsman shall include with his opinion any reply made by the
5 agency.

6 Sec. 24.55.210. NOTICE TO THE COMPLAINANT. After a reasonable
7 time has elapsed, the ombudsman shall notify the complainant of the
8 actions taken by him and by the agency.

9 ARTICLE 5. MISCELLANEOUS.

10 Sec. 24.55.220. MISCONDUCT BY AGENCY PERSONNEL. If the ombudsman
11 thinks there is a breach of duty or misconduct by an officer or employee
12 of an agency, he shall refer the matter to the chief executive officer
13 of the agency.

14 Sec. 24.55.230. ANNUAL REPORT. The ombudsman shall submit to
15 the legislature and the public an annual report discussing his activi-
16 ties under this chapter.

17 Sec. 24.55.240. JUDICIAL REVIEW. No proceeding or decision of
18 the ombudsman may be reviewed in a court, unless it contravenes the
19 provisions of this chapter.

20 Sec. 24.55.250. IMMUNITY OF THE OMBUDSMAN. The ombudsman has
21 the same immunities from civil and criminal liability as a judge of
22 this state.

23 Sec. 24.55.260. PRIVILEGE NOT TO TESTIFY. The ombudsman and his
24 staff shall not testify in a court with respect to matters coming to
25 their attention in the exercise or purported exercise of their official
26 duties except as may be necessary to enforce the provisions of this
27 chapter.

28 Sec. 24.55.270. PENALTY. A person who wilfully hinders the
29 lawful actions of the ombudsman or his staff, or who wilfully refuses

1 to comply with their lawful demands, is guilty of a misdemeanor and
2 upon conviction is punishable by a fine of not more than \$1,000.

3 ARTICLE 6. GENERAL PROVISIONS.

4 Sec. 24.55.280. DEFINITIONS. In this chapter

5 (1) "agency" means a department, office, agency or board in
6 the executive branch of the state government and an officer, employee
7 or member of an "agency" acting or purporting to act in the exercise of
8 his official duties, but "agency" does not include the governor or his
9 personal staff;

10 (2) "administrative act" means an action, omission, decision,
11 recommendation, practice, or procedure, but does not include the
12 preparation or presentation of legislation.

13 Sec. 24.55.290. SHORT TITLE. This chapter may be cited as the
14 Ombudsman Act of 1971.

15 * Sec. 2. Sec. 24.55.260 in sec. 1 of this Act amends Rule 43(h) of the
16 Rules of Civil Procedure by establishing an additional privilege not to
17 testify in a court and must receive an affirmative vote of two-thirds of
18 the full membership of each house in order to be effective.

19 * Sec. 3. This Act takes effect on the day after its passage and approval
20 or on the day it becomes law without approval.
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