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Home Rule Communities Bill Passes House

Rep. Dyson's HB 16 Allows New Towns to Provide Pick of Services

(JUNEAU) – The House today passed a bill making it easier for Alaskans to form new local governments, by allowing them to pick and chose what level of services they wanted to provide,” said House Bill 16 sponsor Rep. Fred Dyson (R-Eagle River).

“This bill allows the former category of second-class cities to write their own charter or city constitution, and form the kind of local government that they want to form,” Dyson said from the House floor. “I’m hoping many communities will be very imaginative in doing so, and will evolve a level of government that is comfortable to them, their history and their culture.”

House Bill 16 creates a local government option called the “Home Rule Community” similar to the second-class city, but based on a charter designed to meet that community’s unique needs and desires, Dyson said. HB 16 will also allow second-class cities to reclassify themselves as home rule communities.

While Alaska has at least as many unorganized communities as organized cities, many have chosen not to organize because they prefer not to take on all the responsibilities of being second-class cities, including operating a school district, meeting strict financial auditing standards, and providing land-use, zoning and platting services, Dyson said.

“Existing second-class cities may find relief in a more narrowly crafted charter that allows them to forego services beyond their capability, while accepting responsibility for local needs that can be met with local resources,” he said.

While they could not operate school districts, Home Rule Communities could chose to provide services including parks and recreation, sewer and water, road maintenance, trash collection, ports and harbors, police and fire protection, health clinics, animal control, or planning and zoning. Home Rule Communities would need voter approval to collect and spend any local taxes.

HB 16 would not take effect until after passage of a conforming bill to amend state law to ensure Home Rule Communities were not subject to any unintended mandates. The bill moves next to the Senate.

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