

ALASKA SENATE

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Senator Pete Kelly

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Bill Would Provide Assistance to New Citizens

(JUNEAU) – Sen. Pete Kelly (R-Fairbanks) introduced a bill in the Senate on Wednesday that would create an office to assist naturalized citizens and citizen candidates.

Senate Bill 90 would create the Office of Citizenship Assistance as a branch of the State Ombudsman’s Office. Naturalized citizens and people who are actively pursuing United States citizenship could receive help navigating through state and private service agencies. The new office would provide the extra assistance that new residents in the United States sometimes need.

“Many of our new citizens come from countries and cultures where you would never dream of approaching the government for something – it might be dangerous to do so,” said Kelly. “What these citizens do instead is suffer in silence. This new office would provide them with an avenue to basic services, rights and privileges that they already have, but language barriers and cultural differences may keep them from accessing.”

The Office of Citizenship Assistance would act as a liaison between individuals and the Office of the Ombudsman or the State Commission for Human Rights. The office would also be able to provide information including:

- Immigration services, such as how to obtain visas or become naturalized citizens
- Employment and job placement services, including guiding people through the appropriate agencies to resolve issues such as illegal termination, job discrimination or unsafe working conditions
- Affordable legal services, medical services and housing
- Education opportunities, including the availability of scholarships and loans
- Credit counseling and disputes with credit card companies
- Interactions with law enforcement agencies and the court system

The director and staff of the Citizenship Assistance Office would be selected for their sensitivity to the diverse cultural backgrounds of the people they would help. The office staff would be able to help individuals adjust to life in the US while being respectful of the social customs from their clients’ countries of origin.

“The stories of the economic opportunities in Alaska have gone around the world since the gold rush days, creating a melting pot of diverse cultures as people come here from all over to find work,” said Kelly. “Alaskans should welcome these new citizens to our state. The Citizenship Assistance Office will make it easier for them to obtain access to state and private agencies.”

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Comments from Sen. Kelly are available on the Majority Actuality Line, 800-478-6540.