



ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
REPRESENTATIVE JOHN HARRIS

STATE CAPITOL 513, JUNEAU, ALASKA 99801-1182 (907) 465-4859

Sponsor Statement

HB 202 – “An Act granting park rangers status as peace officers under the public employees’ retirement system; and providing for an effective date.”

A.S. 39.35.370(a)(2) determines which public employees receive a 20-year retirement benefit. Currently that benefit is limited to peace officers and fire fighters. House Bill 202 proposes to amend the definition of “peace officers” to include Commissioned Park Rangers. If this were to occur, Park Rangers would also receive the 20-year retirement benefit.

Park Rangers are Department of Natural Resources employees who are designated by the Commissioner of DNR as peace officers of the state of Alaska under A.S. 41.21.955(b). They are commissioned law enforcement personnel who have been granted the authority in state parks to enforce criminal laws and regulations. It is a crime to resist arrest by a Park Ranger and there is a penalty for refusing a Park Rangers request for assistance. Park Rangers carry firearms and may use deadly force under certain circumstances. They conduct search and rescue, pursue and arrest persons who violate criminal laws, investigate criminal activities, gather evidence and testify in court about their law enforcement actions.

Approximately half of all Alaska State Park Rangers work seasonally and some work as few as 7 months per year. Under the current retirement system, a park ranger who works nine month in a calendar year would be required to work 40 years to receive 30 years of retirement credit. Under the current system, that park ranger would retire based on actual age rather than time served in the system. It is very unlikely that a seasonal park ranger would receive the full retirement benefit from a 30-year retirement system. Moving these state employees to the 20-year retirement system is the right thing to do.

Alternatively, Park Rangers could be granted the benefits of the 20-year retirement system while not expanding the definition of “peace officer” to include Park Rangers. This could be accomplished by amending A.S. 39.35.370(a)(2) to include the term “Park Ranger” as a separate category of individuals who receive this benefit. A definition of “Park Ranger” would need to be included in A.S. 39.35.680 that clearly identifies Commissioned Park Rangers as a unique employee class within state service. This change would require an amendment to contribution rates and retirement benefit percentage ratings. This alternative would permit the park rangers to receive the 20-year retirement benefit without including them under the definition of “peace officers”.