

# Sponsor Statement for House Bill 248

## 20-Year Retirement Provision for Juvenile Officer

**“An Act relating to retirement contributions and benefits under the public employees' retirement system of certain juvenile detention employees and juvenile correctional institution employees.”**

Presently, Alaska law ([AS 39.35.370\(a\)\(2\)](#)) states that peace officers and firefighters are entitled to normal retirement benefit after 20 years of service. [HB 248](#) adds “juvenile officers” to AS 39.35.370(a)(2) as employees eligible to participate in the 20-year retirement system. The term “juvenile officer” is defined to mean a “youth counselor, unit leader, or superintendent in a juvenile detention or juvenile correctional facility”. Generally speaking, these “juvenile officers” are the employees who work with juveniles inside a correctional facility. They have the same or very similar training, and authority to restrain and arrest individuals as other peace officers.

Juveniles who are in a correctional facility are there for reasons such as commission of a serious crime, mental health problems, substance abuse problems, or combination of all of these issues. Such juveniles demand the highest level of care and rehabilitation efforts, while at the same time, presenting the highest level of risk to juvenile officers.

Presently, probation officers and other employees working with juveniles outside a correctional facility qualify for a 20-year retirement. As presently written, the statutes create an uneven situation where a probation officer working outside a correctional facility could arrest and deliver a juvenile to a correctional facility. The officer outside the facility would be entitled to a 20-year retirement while the officers inside the facility are not. Adult correctional officers also qualify for a 20-year retirement.

Providing a 20-year retirement system for juvenile officers is fair since these employees perform the same or very similar work duties as other employees charged with preserving public safety. It also creates an incentive for existing juvenile officers to remain in their positions and will attract qualified applicants for new positions.