

# Sponsor Statement for HB 377

## Workers' Compensation Board Panels

***An Act relating to the establishment of an additional southcentral panel to the Alaska Workers' Compensation Board and to appointments to that panel; and providing for an effective date.***

**Released:** February 1, 2002  
**Contact:** Representative John Harris's office at (907) 465-4859

HB 377 would amend the Workers' Compensation Act to provide for an additional panel of the Alaska Workers' Compensation Board in the Southcentral venue. This is needed to help provide more hearings in that area of the state, and will address the need to reduce the lag time between when a worker files a claim and obtaining a hearing. It will also relieve a growing caseload.

The Alaska Workers' Compensation Act requires hearings to be conducted by panels of the Workers' Compensation Board. A panel consists of a labor member and an industry member, with a designee of the commissioner of the department of labor and workforce development. The commissioner's designee is an employee of the State of Alaska, while the other two members are lay volunteers who receive a \$50 per day stipend.

The industry seat members of the panels usually work in some management position, while the labor members are usually officers of labor unions. This makes for a very good mix for deciding these types of cases, but panel members also have full time jobs outside of the division, and, as a result, tend to be very busy, with limited time that they can devote to hearings. Consequently, there are only so many hearings that can be conducted with the current complement of panel members.

Enactment of HB 377 would be a logical way to provide much-needed relief to the Workers' Compensation Board.