

SPONSOR STATEMENT SENATE BILL 65

“An Act requiring a study to determine if gender is a determinant in state employee compensation.”

SB 65 requires the State of Alaska to conduct a study to determine if gender plays a role in state employee compensation. The State of Alaska has never performed a pay equity study. SB 65 provides a mechanism to assure the state is in compliance with federal law. If two workers do the same or similar job, it is illegal under federal law to pay each different wages based solely on their gender. Unfortunately, there is research showing that wage disparities between the sexes may exist in Alaska state government today. We know that on average Alaskan women working for the state are being paid less than men. What we don't know is why. Only a pay equity study can answer that question. Only a pay equity study can determine whether the pay discrepancies are legal or illegal.

State employees should be paid based on the value of the work they perform, not based on whether they are men or women. If two jobs require a high school diploma, a year of experience, and have comparable hazards and responsibilities, both jobs should be paid equally.

Passage of SB 65 is, in itself, the right thing to do. But for those who are concerned about the costs to the state, there is another reason to support SB 65. Failure to address this situation could expose the state to expensive, time-consuming and divisive litigation.

Alaska should learn from mistakes made in other states. In Washington, legislators ignored evidence that women in state government were paid less than men and refused to enact legislation to correct this injustice. After years of litigation, Washington state employees achieved pay equity through court action. The ultimate cost to the state was much higher than it would have been if the legislature had dealt with the problem.

Other states have been successful in voluntarily dealing with the problem of women being paid less than men for equal work. The approach used by other states, and set out in SB 65, is to first identify if there are instances in which the state is illegally paying women less than men. If the study finds such instances, then the state can develop phased strategies to eliminate gender discrimination.

SB 65 promotes fairness in the workplace and recognizes the valuable work that is being performed by the men and women in our state government. In the long run, the passage of SB 65 could save the state a great deal of money.

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