

Sponsor Statement for SB 367

Pers Benefits For Juvenile Institution Employees

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

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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. SB 367 adds *juvenile officers* to this statute as employees eligible to participate in the 20-year retirement system. The term *juvenile officer* is defined as, "youth counselor, unit leader, or superintendent in a juvenile detention or juvenile correctional facility." Juvenile officers are the employees who work with juveniles **inside** a correctional facility. They have the same or very similar training as other peace officers as well as the authority to restrain and arrest individuals.

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 a combination of all of these issues. These youths demand the highest level of care and rehabilitation efforts while presenting high levels of risk to their officers.

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. SB 367 creates an incentive for existing juvenile officers to remain in their positions and will attract qualified applicants for new positions.