

HOUSE BILL NO. 258

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTIETH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY REPRESENTATIVE TUCK

Introduced: 1/8/18

Referred: Prefiled

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

1 **"An Act establishing the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing."**

2 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

3 * **Section 1.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section
4 to read:

5 LEGISLATIVE INTENT. It is the intent of the legislature that the Commission for
6 the Deaf and Hard of Hearing obtain, within five years after the commission is established,
7 funding from sources other than the general fund to support the operation of the commission
8 so as not to reduce the level of state funds presently available for services for persons who are
9 deaf or hard of hearing.

10 * **Sec. 2.** AS 36.30.850(b) is amended by adding a new paragraph to read:

11 (49) contracts for equipment and services entered into by the
12 Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing under AS 44.21.510 - 44.21.550.

13 * **Sec. 3.** AS 44.21 is amended by adding new sections to read:

14 **Article 7. Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.**

15 **Sec. 44.21.510. Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.** (a) The

1 Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is established in the Department of
 2 Administration to coordinate and improve access to services and provide advocacy
 3 and outreach for persons in the state who are deaf or hard of hearing.

4 (b) The commission consists of seven members appointed by the governor as
 5 follows:

6 (1) four members who are deaf or hard of hearing;

7 (2) one member who is a parent of a person who is deaf or hard of
 8 hearing;

9 (3) one member who is an officer or employee of a private or
 10 municipal organization that provides services to persons who are deaf or hard of
 11 hearing; and

12 (4) one member who is an employee of a state agency that provides
 13 services to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

14 (c) The commission shall, by majority vote of the membership, elect a chair
 15 and other officers the commission considers necessary from among its membership to
 16 serve on a yearly basis.

17 (d) The commissioner of administration shall, upon request of the executive
 18 director of the commission, provide for the assignment of additional temporary or
 19 permanent personnel to the commission that are necessary for the commission to
 20 exercise its powers under AS 44.21.510 - 44.21.550.

21 **Sec. 44.21.520. Term of office and compensation.** (a) The term of office of
 22 each member of the commission is three years. If a vacancy occurs on the
 23 commission, the governor shall appoint a successor to serve the unexpired portion of
 24 the term.

25 (b) Members of the commission serve without compensation, but are entitled
 26 to per diem and travel expenses authorized for boards and commissions under
 27 AS 39.20.180.

28 **Sec. 44.21.530. Duties of the commission.** The commission shall

29 (1) serve as a clearinghouse of public information for consumers,
 30 public and private entities, and the general public on issues related to the deaf and hard
 31 of hearing community;

1 (2) expand and improve the availability of telecommunications
2 equipment and accessories for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind;

3 (3) provide outreach services to promote compliance with federal,
4 state, and local accessibility laws and regulations by collaborating with consumers,
5 public and private entities, and other stakeholders to develop policy;

6 (4) develop strategies for systematic change and programs in
7 government and community agencies and organizations to improve communication
8 access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing;

9 (5) provide an educational and informational program through printed
10 materials, workshops and training sessions, presentations, and public awareness events
11 about hearing loss for people in the state; the program must include information about
12 referral services, lending libraries, services and resources, interpreters, accessibility
13 and accommodation issues, assistive technology, empowerment issues, obligations of
14 service providers for and employers of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing,
15 educational options, and current federal and state laws and policies regarding hearing
16 loss;

17 (6) cooperate with public, private, and government agencies to
18 coordinate programs for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing;

19 (7) provide technical assistance, consultation, and training to
20 individuals or organizations who intend to start or enhance programs and services for
21 persons who are deaf or hard of hearing;

22 (8) evaluate and monitor state programs that deliver services to persons
23 who are deaf or hard of hearing to determine their effectiveness; identify and promote
24 new programs and services when necessary; make recommendations to public officials
25 about changes necessary to improve the quality and delivery of services, programs,
26 and activities;

27 (9) make funding recommendations to the legislature regarding new or
28 existing programs for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing;

29 (10) review, evaluate, and make recommendations to state agencies,
30 the legislature, and the governor regarding laws and regulations that affect persons
31 who are deaf or hard of hearing;

1 (11) promote cooperation among state and local agencies that provide
2 educational programs for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing;

3 (12) establish standards, by regulation, relating to the evaluation,
4 certification, licensure, and training of interpreters for persons who are deaf or hard of
5 hearing;

6 (13) complete an annual report describing the activities of the
7 commission and submit the report, on or before January 1, to the governor, the senate
8 secretary, and the chief clerk of the house of representatives and notify the legislature
9 that the report is available.

10 **Sec. 44.21.540. Powers of the commission.** The commission may

11 (1) adopt regulations necessary to carry out the purposes of
12 AS 44.21.510 - 44.21.550;

13 (2) work with the Department of Education and Early Development,
14 the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska, school districts, and other public
15 and private entities to ensure the continuation of interpreter education programs
16 designed to increase the number of qualified and competent interpreters for persons
17 who are deaf or hard of hearing in the state;

18 (3) employ an executive director;

19 (4) obtain equipment, including teletypewriter machines and
20 videophones, and services, including interpreter services, necessary for the
21 commission to exercise its powers under AS 44.21.510 - 44.21.550;

22 (5) apply for and accept grants or donations to assist the commission in
23 carrying out the purposes of AS 44.21.510 - 44.21.550.

24 **Sec. 44.21.550. Definitions.** In AS 44.21.510 - 44.21.550,

25 (1) "commission" means the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of
26 Hearing;

27 (2) "deaf" means unable to hear and understand speech such that a
28 person's primary mode of communication is through American Sign Language or
29 another sign language, lip reading, gestures, or writing;

30 (3) "hard of hearing" means partial loss of hearing in one or both ears,
31 resulting in difficulty hearing and understanding speech in the affected ear.