



Representative Allen Kemplen

SPONSOR STATEMENT

HB 355

"An Act establishing a state community service program; establishing by statute the Alaska State Community Service Commission; and providing for an effective date."

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?" said Rev. Martin Luther King. HB 355 seeks to clarify Rev. King's question for the State of Alaska by establishing the State Community Service Program. HB 355 strengthens the existing Alaska Community Service Commission while addressing unmet community needs and rewarding good neighbors for taking part in community service. Community service or "volunteerism" is simply giving your time and your abilities for the betterment of society.

Voluntary service to your community makes people feel good, helps ease social ills and costs very little. Organizations like the United Way, Americorps, VISTA volunteers, Catholic Community Services, SAGA, and ORCA all provide important community services that would be cost-prohibitive without volunteers. State and private organizations cannot afford the labor intensive services that benefit Alaska's residents. As direct beneficiaries of volunteers, senior citizen programs, day-care centers, and after school programs are able to better the quality-of-life in Alaska. Nationally in 1998, 56% of adults aged 18 or over volunteered a total of 19.9 billion hours worth an estimated \$225.9 billion.

As state and local governments face budget shortfalls, the need for community service is becoming increasingly clear. Commonly, community service fills the gap between the private sector and the government sector by providing needed services that the government can't afford to pay for and the private sector won't pay for. The trend for state governments within the nation has been to reduce the cost of state services. Further reductions in elderly care, child care and education necessitates the extension of volunteerism within the state.

HB 355 revamps the existing Community Service Commission which currently only distributes federal Americorps funds. By expanding the role of the Community Service Commission and creating the new Alaska Community Service Program, HB 355 enhances the commission's abilities to create and assess community services within the state. As part of the program, volunteers would be rewarded for completion of successful terms of service with housing and educational vouchers. Importantly, through reinvestment in the state's volunteers, HB 355 encourages Alaskans to get involved and volunteer their time while establishing a real connection between their neighbors and the entire community.