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SPONSOR STATEMENT

HB 202

"An Act relating to telecommunications services for certain disabled subscribers; and providing for an effective date."

In 1990, as amended in 1992, the legislature granted the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) the authority to require telephone utilities to serve the deaf, hard of hearing and speech impaired citizens of Alaska. Thus, enabling these subscribers to communicate by telephone to persons of normal hearing. This is accomplished by commissioning a Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) provider to offer interpretive service operators to relay the teletyped, voice or signed messages from one party to another.

The Statute requires the RCA to "make[s] available reasonable access of all phases of public telephone service to..." this subscriber group. Therefore, the TRS provider has an equipment distribution and outreach program which is currently limited to teletype units (TTY) and Captel telephones which are texting devices. In order to meet this statutory mandate, It is the goal of the RCA to bring the equipment distribution program into the digital age of the 21st century, for example, starting with a tablet/ipad pilot program.

RCA regulations provide for cost recovery through a surcharge added to the "Basic Local Exchange Rate" which means landline telephones only a/k/a "POTS": "Plain old telephone service." A problem has developed due to the accelerating migration from wireline (POTS) to wireless (mobile/cell) phones and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). This substitution of equipment and communication transport method has decreased the number of wireline subscribers yielding diminished surcharge fees from a smaller customer base and pushed up monthly surcharge fees on customer bills to .09¢ residential and .18¢ business landline services. Lastly, the bill changes the term "speech impairment" to "speech disabled" to recognize the more

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respectful term of disability currently in use by the disabled community and the FCC.
In summary this bill does the following:

- 1) Allows the RCA to more equitably assess the TRS surcharge to growing numbers of cellphone and VoIP users thereby enabling a reduction in the cost to landline customers and a lower overall rate;
- 2) Expand the type of telecommunication devices and software to the deaf, hard of hearing, and speech disabled Alaskans;
- 3) Recognizes the appropriate language to be used for the speech disabled; and
- 4) Providing for a July 1, 2017 effective date consistent with the operating agreement cycle with the current TRS provider.

Please support this bill to meet the legislature's mandate to assist the full inclusion of Alaskans with disabilities with greater independence and an improved quality of life.