

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA
REPRESENTATIVE MARY KAPSNER

HB 36 Appropriation: Revenue Sharing and Safe Communities

Sponsor Statement

For over 30 years, the State of Alaska provided some form of revenue sharing to local communities to support important local government functions. Communities have used this money to fund functions from public safety needs such as police and fire department services, to basic services such as road maintenance, and water and sewer services to its residents. In 2004, for the first time in 34 years, that assistance to local communities was halted.

In the wake of the loss of Revenue Sharing and Safe Communities grants, Alaska's communities have struggled to continue to provide services. Not only are Alaskans paying increased fees and taxes, but many are still suffering the loss of important services. Some cities are experiencing grave problems that affect the life and safety of their citizens. The City of Nenana, for instance, has closed its police department. The City of Bettles has turned off its streetlights, and closed its fire department for the winter. The City of Kobuk is unable to keep its youth and community center open. Many small cities are contemplating closing their operations entirely.

When local governments close police departments, the State pays the costs of additional Troopers. When local governments can't maintain water and sewer systems properly, the State will eventually be faced with replacing them. The Revenue Sharing and Safe Communities programs ultimately save the State money.

If we want strong local governments, and if we want to provide an incentive for unorganized areas of the state to consider creating local governments, the Revenue Sharing and Safe Communities programs are essential. House Bill 36 would restore these programs, providing funds at fiscal year 1998 levels, adjusted for inflation, in order to provide for public safety and other vital services for Alaskans.