

# Sponsor Statement

## HB 55

[House Bill 55](#) authorizes the [Department of Corrections](#) to enter into agreement with the [City of Whittier](#) for a 1,200-bed medium security correctional facility and services for a period of 25 years. The facility shall be constructed and operated by third-party contractors procured through a competitive bid process.

All of Alaska's 15 regional correctional facilities are currently operating at or over capacity with over 600 Alaskan prisoners housed in Arizona. With prisoner population projected to grow at the rate of approximately 200 inmates per year, the current situation is grave.

Prison overcrowding exposes inmates and staff to the risk of serious injury and death, and exposes the State to civil liability, as well as judicial intervention into the management prerogatives of the executive branch.

The State will benefit economically and socially by procuring in-state prison beds at significantly less cost than State-operated beds; by returning Alaskan prisoners closer to the resources necessary for effective rehabilitation; by diminishing State liability for the effects of prison overcrowding; and by providing programs designed to break the cycle of Alaska Native recidivism.

This bill will create more than 500 direct and indirect, union scale construction jobs, and more than 450 permanent, direct and indirect, jobs for Alaskans associated with prison operations for the 25-year lease term authorized by the legislation. In addition, it will stimulate the Alaskan economy with the purchase of goods and services associated with a \$110 million construction project.

The prison will serve as an anchor industry in Whittier, generating vital economic benefits for an economically disadvantaged rural community. Additionally, this project will utilize the recently completed \$90 million Anton Anderson tunnel justifying reduced tolls and expanded hours of operation.

Whittier completed a public process documenting local support from 80% of resident, adult registered voters before competitively soliciting contractors and bringing the proposal before the legislature in 2002. Whittier renewed the process with the same results in 2003.

Additionally, this legislation authorizes the Department of Corrections to enter into agreements with the [Fairbanks North Star Borough](#), the [Matanuska-Susitna Borough](#), the [City of Bethel](#), and the [City of Seward](#) for the expansion of existing correctional facilities.