

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Session: January - April
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Official Business

Sponsor Statement

House Bill 32

"An Act relating to employer-required drug testing; requiring the Alaska Workers' Compensation Board to adopt regulations relating to the prescription of controlled substances to employees; and relating to the prescription of controlled substances to employees."

Since the 1990's, prescription drug use has tripled in the United States, and is now considered an epidemic by the Centers for Disease Control. Deaths as a result of overdoses from prescription drugs have quadrupled since 1999, and exceed deaths from heroin and cocaine combined. There has been a growing reliance on prescription drugs to treat chronic pain within the workers' compensation system as well.

For workers' compensation claimants, the use of prescription drugs, and in particular, opioids can lead to addiction, increased disability or work loss, and even death. It has been estimated that at least 200 deaths per year are the result of opioids in workers' compensation cases in the United States.

Not only are long-term opiate prescriptions detrimental to employees, they are extremely costly to employers. In 2011, prescription drugs comprised nearly twenty percent of medical costs in workers' compensation claims in Alaska. In cases where the claimant has been prescribed a controlled substance for more than ninety days, the long-term costs to the employer are estimated to range from one thousand to twelve thousand dollars monthly.

HB 32 discourages the use of long-term opioids by restricting powerful narcotics prescriptions to a 30 day supply for claimants. This serves as a deterrent to long-term use and abuse of opioids by requiring contact with a provider who is prescribing pain medication. HB 32 also enables medical providers to ensure employees are receiving the proper pain medication needed to facilitate healing, by allowing employees to undergo drug testing if the employee has been prescribed a controlled substance for over 90 days. Not only is there a cost savings embedded in restricting the supply of opioid prescriptions, there is the potential to save human lives.