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Senator Lesil McGuire

Sponsor Statement for Senate Bill 182

“An Act relating to DNA testing to determine an individual’s ancestry.”

SB 182 amends the Alaska Genetic Privacy Act to address the field of genetic genealogy, and to clarify that the Act does not apply to this field.

Genetic genealogy differs from most other applications of biotechnology science in two ways: (1) rather than being used for medical purposes, genetic genealogy is used to establish ancestral relationships between people, and (2) rather than focusing on an individual, the core of genetic genealogy involves comparing certain genetic information from two or more individuals to determine whether there is a shared common ancestry.

Based upon a review of the legislative history, it is apparent that Alaska lawmakers did not consider genetic genealogy when it enacted the Genetic Privacy Act. Given all the contributions this field has brought over the years to numerous families (including many adoptees), it is timely to consider these kinds of developments affected by the Alaska Genetic Privacy Act. Certain aspects of the Act already can be read to except genetic genealogy, but other aspects of the Act could be interpreted to include genetic genealogy.

Genetic genealogy is not designed to reveal sensitive personal information; rather, it is designed to reveal ancestral information. Anyone who conducts genealogical research by using genetic genealogy would rightfully expect for his and/or her test results to be shared and compared with others’ test results. The purpose of keeping information private is inimical to the very function of genetic genealogy to establish connections between individuals.

Rather than stifle this research opportunity for Alaskans and their families, we would respectfully recommend amendments to recognize genetic genealogy.

I ask for your support on Senate Bill 182.