

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Session

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SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI

SPONSOR STATEMENT

Senate Bill 194

Lao/Hmong Veteran Driver's License & ID Card

Senate Bill 194 would expand the eligibility for a Veteran's designation on state-issued ID cards and driver's licenses to include Lao Veterans who served in military operations in support of American interests during the Vietnam era and Secret War. Trained covertly by the CIA and armed by the United States, over 35,000 Hmong soldiers fought valiantly in the Kingdom of Laos to block the primary supply route of the North Vietnamese Army, gather intelligence, support American military personnel and rescue downed pilots.

The high cost of service paid by Hmong fighters and civilians is testament to their dedication and loyalty. During the conflict, heavy bombing campaigns decimated the agricultural livelihood of the Hmong people. It is estimated close to 100,000 Hmong soldiers and civilians died during the conflict, and far more were displaced. When Laos finally fell to Communist forces, tens of thousands more were forced to flee to avoid retribution and reprisal.

Despite serving honorably in the Vietnam War, Hmong Veterans were not formally recognized for their courage and sacrifice. Instead, they have waited decades and many passed away before being honored for their service. Today, the significant role of the Hmong people in the Vietnam War is only just beginning to be respected.

Under current statute, the Division of Motor Vehicles offers a Veteran designation on driver's licenses and state ID cards to those who can show proof of Veteran status. However, as Lao Veterans who served the US overseas do not possess a formal DD214, these populations are not currently benefiting from this designation.

In an effort to honor Lao Veterans in Alaska for their service and support to our country, I urge your support of Senate Bill 194.