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Governor Bill Walker
STATE OF ALASKA

May 23, 2016

The Honorable Mike Chenault
Speaker of the House
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 208
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Speaker Chenault:

Under the authority of Article III, Section 18, of the Alaska Constitution, I am transmitting a bill relating to providing major medical benefits to the eligible survivors of peace officers and firefighters whose deaths occur while in the performance of their duties and who are members of the Public Employees' Retirement System of Alaska (PERS). This bill would apply to PERS members employed by the State and to PERS members employed by PERS-participating political subdivisions.

Currently, occupational death benefits in the form of system-paid major medical benefits are available only to the survivors of Tier I employees in the defined benefit plan (employees first hired before July 1, 1986). Under the existing defined contribution plan (members first hired on or after July 1, 2006), a person is not eligible for system-paid major medical benefits.

This bill would extend major medical benefit coverage to the survivors of peace officers and firefighters whose deaths occur as a result of their jobs, regardless of what Tier applied to the deceased member. In addition, for defined contribution members, the bill would allow for a 100 percent premium subsidy for major medical benefits for eligible survivors of peace officers or firefighters whose death was occupational.

The PERS defined contribution plan requires that members retire directly from the plan in order to be eligible for medical benefits. To effectuate the goals of this legislation, the bill modifies this requirement to allow eligible survivors of a peace officer or firefighter whose death occurs as a result of employment to receive major medical benefits under PERS.

This bill would have a retroactive effective date and would apply to the eligible survivors of peace officers or firefighters who have died in the line of duty on or after January 1, 2013.

I urge your prompt and favorable action on this measure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Walker".

Bill Walker
Governor