

Re: House Bill 66, Survivor Benefits Under the Public Employees' Retirement System of Alaska

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Brandy Johnson and I am testifying in support of HB 66 on behalf of myself, my three daughters, my late husband, Scott Johnson and for the spouses of current and past Alaska State Troopers.

Prior to this year, I often thought how I had never experienced the loss of someone close to me. Little did I know, when I did, it would be my best friend, husband and the father of my three children, Scott Johnson.

Scott's job was that of an Alaska State Trooper.

On May 1st, 2014, I had State Troopers waiting for me to get home. Two of Scott's friends, and fellow State Troopers later came to the door in tears. They didn't have to tell me, after seeing their faces, I knew Scott was dead.

Scott was shot to death by Nathaniel Kangas in Tanana, Alaska, while in the line of duty.

Five years ago, at his 18 year mark with PERS, Scott came to Juneau, as the Northern Vice President of the Public Safety Employees Association to lobby for HB 242, legislation that would provide Tier II State Troopers full medical benefits at their 20 year mark in the State of Alaska Retirement Plan. Unfortunately, the legislation failed to pass.

Because the legislation failed, he needed to work an additional seven years as a Tier II Alaska State Trooper, to qualify for full medical at retirement instead of two years if HB 242 had passed. Since, we had three daughters, this was an important consideration.

My husband had worked 23 years with the State when he was killed. Two years shy of retirement and qualifying for full medical.

My first question to the State Troopers helping me after Scott was killed was, "Do I and the girls have medical benefits?" I was initially told I was set for life by one Lieutenant. However, that was not the case. I was later told that my family's benefits would expire at the end of the month, on May 31.

Finding this out, I was shocked, disappointed and angry. I had thought the medical coverage would have been similar to what we were getting prior to Scott's murder. I felt his last three years of service were all for nothing.

Scott always took his responsibilities very seriously to protect the people of Alaska. I had believed upon his death, the State would also take the responsibility to now take care of his family.

I later learned Trooper Tage Toll's wife, Nikki Toll had exactly one day of health insurance for her and her three boys after Tage and Mel Nading were killed in a helicopter accident on March 30, 2013.

What is frustrating is that the person who shot my husband to death and his father who helped move my husband's dead body, while they are incarcerated, they have medical available at no cost to them.

I am here today asking for your support of House Bill 66, legislation that will help take care of the families of those peace officers killed in the line of duty in the State of Alaska. This legislation will ensure that another wife or husband will be allowed to grieve, if they ever have to experience what I have, instead of trying to ensure their family has medical coverage.

Thank you for your time, and your consideration of this important legislation.

Brandy Johnson

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