

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON

Sponsor Statement

Sponsor Substitute for House Bill 7

Sponsor Substitute for House Bill 7 aims to increase driver awareness of pedestrians and bicyclists through enhanced penalties for dangerous driving. While vehicle-on-person offenses can presently be charged as felony assaults, this new crime would allow for alternative elements reflecting the criminal act. This would give discretion to prosecutors as to how and what to charge for the offense at issue.

There were 65 fatal traffic crashes in Alaska in 2014 that resulted in 70 fatalities (some crashes resulted in multiple deaths). There were 13 pedestrian fatalities and three bicyclist fatalities, which makes up 22.9% of all traffic fatalities last year. Since 2010, there have been 50 pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities making up 16.2% of all fatal traffic crashes.

As the state continues to grow, pedestrian and bicyclist presence will only increase, which could lead to an increase in fatalities amongst these groups. Added to this is an increase in walkability and bikeability, spawned by both a desire for physical fitness and a reduction of our carbon footprint. By increasing the penalties for dangerous practices behind the wheel, drivers will have to become more aware of their surroundings, leading to an overall increase in safe driving practices.

Not only will this bill apply to pedestrians and bicyclists who are killed by dangerous drivers, but it will also apply to drunk drivers who kill innocent bystanders. SSHB7 would help prosecutors keep these dangerous drivers off the road.

I invite you to discuss this issue with me further and urge you to support this legislation.