

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

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Sponsor Statement | HB 82 — Off Highway Driver's Licenses

HB 82 would change the eligibility requirements for off-highway restricted driver's licenses, on which many rural Alaskans depend to drive legally at home.

Off-highway restricted licenses, which do not require a road test, are currently available to residents in 279 of Alaska's off-road system communities. Community eligibility is based on criteria borrowed from statutes that establish vehicle registration exemptions. Residents are exempt from vehicle registration, and qualify for off-highway licenses, if their communities are unconnected to the state highway system and if no road in their town has an average daily traffic count greater than 499.

HB 82 closes a loophole created by the current criteria, in which residents with no access to DMV offices or state highways don't qualify for off-highway restricted licenses if their communities have traffic accounts above 499. These residents face prohibitive conditions to receive licenses: they must travel to and stay in communities with DMV offices; borrow or rent vehicles; and schedule and take road tests on unfamiliar roads or highways before they can be legally allowed to drive at home. Too often, this means that many never get licensed at all.

This bill streamlines eligibility requirements: instead of making it contingent on traffic counts, it would simply allow residents of communities off the road system with no access to a DMV office to qualify for off-highway licenses.

The bill also changes criteria for auto insurance exemptions to match the criteria for off-highway license eligibility. Without this corresponding change, drivers newly eligible for off-highway licenses under the bill would still be de facto required to obtain an unrestricted driver's license due to the prohibitive cost of carrying insurance while holding only an off-highway license.

HB 82 creates more logical criteria to determine eligibility for off-highway licenses and allows residents of off-highway communities to become legally licensed to drive without the time and expense of traveling to DMV offices for services other Alaskans can get at home.