

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON

Sponsor Statement

House Bill 30: The Abigail Caudle Act

In 2011, a 26 year-old electrical worker, Abigail Caudle, lost her life to employer- workplace negligence. Hers was a wrongful death warranting compensation. Under current Alaska statute, when a worker without children, a spouse, or dependents dies due to a work-related injury, their family only receives reimbursement for the cost of the funeral, and under worker's compensation law, are unable to sue for wrongful death.

House Bill 30 (HB 30) rectifies this issue and others in the state's current system and brings Alaska's compensation levels for injury, illness or death of workers into the present.

HB 30 specifies that when an employee dies without having a spouse or minor children, parents of the deceased receive a death benefit compensation of \$120,000. If there are no surviving parents, this benefit is payable to the estate of the deceased. Unmarried, childless workers are the only class of worker that does not receive some form of death benefit compensation. HB 30 allows parents of the deceased appropriate compensation and helps alleviate the burden of any debt of the deceased. It is time for Alaska to join the 13 other states offering compensation to families of workers who die from a work-related injury or illness but have no eligible dependents.

HB 30 addresses the problem of inadequate financial support for older children after their single parent dies on the job. The bill provides for support payments to extend for five years after an individual is no longer considers a child by the definition provided in AS 23.30.395(8).

HB 30 encourages equitable compensation for workers suffering from permanent injuries or illnesses by adjusting the base Permanent Partial Impairment (PPI) values for inflation. The Permanent Partial Impairment index has not been adjusted in 18 years.

HB 30 also increases the aggregate wage benefits for financially dependent parents, grandchildren, brothers and sisters of the deceased. This amount hasn't been adjusted for inflation in a staggering 53 years.

The current values for these benefits are egregious and warrant serious change. I invite you to discuss this issue with me further and urge you to support this legislation.

If you have any question or concerns relating to this legislation please feel free to contact myself or my staff, Elise Sorum-Birk by phone at (907) 465-4939 or by email at elise.sorum-birk@akleg.gov.