



# Alaska State Legislature

## Representative Matt Claman

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### House Bill 62

#### Sponsor Statement — Version B.A

*“An Act relating to the Legislative Ethics Act; relating to solemnization of marriage; and relating to consent to marriage.”*

At present, during the solemnization of marriage, couples must assent to the marriage in the presence of each other, the person solemnizing the marriage, and at least two additional witnesses. Afterward, all parties must sign the marriage certificates. House Bill 62 would eliminate the requirements of any additional witnesses at the marriage solemnization and the signatures of these witnesses on marriage certificates to help support Alaska’s destination wedding industry while preserving the integrity of marriage. HB 62 also adds a requirement that a person verify that the parties intend to marry each other. Thus, both the person solemnizing and the person verifying sign the marriage certificate and provide contact information.

Alaska is one of 20 states that require two wedding witnesses—the upper limit of wedding witness requirements nationwide. Twenty-three states and the district of Columbia do not require wedding witnesses at all. Wedding witnesses played a more critical role in past centuries when record keeping was less automated. Witnesses could be contacted to verify the wedding had taken place if records were damaged or missing. Today, however, the role of a wedding witness is ceremonial. In Alaska, while the person solemnizing the marriage must meet certain criteria, no form of witness verification is required—just a signature. HB 62 would allow Alaska to compete with states like Hawaii and Florida, which require no wedding witnesses and lead the nation in destination weddings.

Destination weddings are a significant and growing business in Alaska. Non-resident weddings (where both parties are non-residents) already comprise approximately 10% of marriages in Alaska. But the two witness requirement makes Alaska a less attractive location for many who travel from farther away or who do not want the financial burden of a larger wedding. Couples who come to the state without their own witnesses are tasked with finding strangers to witness their wedding. The burden of supplying these witnesses often falls to those to work in Alaska’s wedding industry who ask friends and family to witness the weddings of their out-of-town clients. The additional witness requirement can also place an increased financial burden on the couple. For example, for a remote location wedding, such as a glacier, the couple must pay extra seating costs to transport the witnesses.

At present, destination weddings bring in an estimated \$1 million in revenue to Alaska in the form of approximately 500 destination weddings a year. This revenue figure doesn’t even account for the fact that more than 90% of the out-of-state couples who come to Alaska to get married stay for days and weeks to explore our great state. The resulting benefit to Alaska’s tourism industry is substantial.