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ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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## Sponsor Statement

HB 77\ Ver. O (34-LS0144\O)

### **Protecting Alaskans from Mail Theft and Identity Fraud**

Mail theft is not just an inconvenience, it is often the starting point for financial fraud, identity theft, and serious economic harm. This is especially true for elderly and vulnerable Alaskans. As personal and financial information is increasingly targeted, state law enforcement needs a clear tool to address these crimes. HB 77 does that by establishing the act of mail theft as a punishable offense.

Millions of Americans report cases of identity theft and fraud each year. These cases are often linked with the theft of checks, credit card statements, and government documents. Between 2019 and 2022 alone, there was an 87% increase in reported mail thefts. According to a Federal Trade Commission report, Alaskan Native and American Indian communities lost just over \$12 million to fraud in 2023. In just one 2024 Alaska case, more than \$39,000 in checks were stolen from the mail. We should be giving every tool reasonable to law enforcement to prevent these crimes.

However, Alaska law does not explicitly define the theft of mail as a crime. This limits law enforcement's ability to charge, prosecute, and sentence offenders. HB 77 addresses this barrier by classifying mail theft as theft in the second degree, ensuring these crimes are treated with the seriousness they deserve and that perpetrators face meaningful consequences.

HB 77 establishes a clear framework in statute, equipping law enforcement with a practical tool to prosecute. Cases will be dealt with more consistently, and deterrence will be improved. Further, HB 77 enhances protections for victims, particularly seniors and other vulnerable populations who are disproportionately affected.

HB 77 is a necessary update to Alaska's theft statutes. It clarifies the law, strengthens accountability, and responds to a growing category of crime.