

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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REPRESENTATIVE WES KELLER DISTRICT 7

HOUSE BILL 16 SPONSOR STATEMENT

“An Act relating to citizenship requirements and an alcohol impairment and drug testing program for applicants for and recipients of special cash assistance.”

The cost of substance abuse in Alaska is staggering. Crime, child abuse, broken homes, domestic violence, cost of business, auto and industrial accidents, poor productivity, chronic health problems all have a causal relationship with substance abuse. It is irrational to expect the government to provide compassionate assistance without giving it the ability to identify substance abuse problems.

When we apply for a job we must provide proof of citizenship and in some cases we may also be required to submit to drug and alcohol testing. We comply because it is part of ensuring that we are qualified to work and because it is part of the package that returns a paycheck.

Transportation, public safety, civil service, construction workers, and children who participate in sports are regularly asked to submit to drug and alcohol testing. Arguments in the public square against requirements for drug testing do not stand up to the arguments for the need to ensure safety.

Our Department of Health and Social Services is mandated to provide public assistance to those who need it. It is not appropriate to simply provide assistance without knowing whether the assistance will actually be fueling an addiction problem. HB 16 gives the department a tool they need to determine if substance or alcohol abuse is part of the equation. HB 16 leaves the initiative with the Department regarding how to specifically respond to a person requesting aid according to best practices to restore them to a productive life in their community.

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