

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Representative Bob Herron

Official Business



State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska
99801-1182

House Bill 301 – Autopsies and Death Certificates

Version 28-LS1196\C

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Each year, around the state, Alaskan families suffer the unexpected loss of a loved one. Accidental death is common in the course of work, play, and providing food for the family table. Each loss is critical. Each family's grief is real.

For many rural Alaskans, the natural grieving process is further complicated by the fact that their deceased loved ones' remains must be shipped into Anchorage, at State expense, for review by the State Medical Examiner (ME) in order to establish a cause of death and obtain the death certificate required for legal burial. On top of staggering loss and major life changes comes the stress of more forms, more requirements, and more confusion in a process that is already difficult to navigate. In many cases families have, without the knowledge required to make fully informed choices, agreed to the use of expensive funeral home services – and then found themselves on the hook for thousands of dollars they do not have but must somehow pay before the funeral homes will allow their loved ones' remains to return home.

At the same time, the State of Alaska currently spends General Fund dollars to transport remains of individuals to and from Anchorage, when existing technology in many regions could be used to reduce the number of transports required.

HB 301 seeks to make minor changes to the law guiding the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services' current autopsy and death certificate issuance process. Recognizing that good people oversee and perform the work addressed in this bill, HB 301 approaches each change with an eye for treating grieving Alaskans with greater compassion, maximizing the use of quality existing resources, and saving state funds – all while continuing to meet legal obligations and ensuring the ME's office retains the support and resources it needs to do the job right.

Please join me in support of HB 301.