



Alaska Federation of Natives
2014 Legislative & Litigation Committee
Resolution 14-2

- TITLE:** SUPPORT FOR AK SB 161/HB 301: AUTOPSIES AND DEATH CERTIFICATES
- WHEREAS:** The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) is the largest statewide Native organization in Alaska and its membership includes 151 federally-recognized tribes, 134 village corporations, 12 regional corporations, and 12 regional nonprofit and tribal consortiums that contract and compact to run federal and state programs; and
- WHEREAS:** The mission of AFN is to enhance and promote the cultural, economic, and political voice of the entire Alaska Native community; and
- WHEREAS:** Each year, Alaskan families suffer the unexpected loss of a loved one due to sudden, suspicious, or non-natural causes, all of which typically occur outside the care of a physician; and
- WHEREAS:** Persons with knowledge of such deaths must notify the State Medical Examiner (SME) for a determination of jurisdiction and corresponding medical death examination to establish cause of death, if jurisdiction is accepted; and
- WHEREAS:** Such examinations usually require that the remains of the deceased be transported to the SMEO in Anchorage, at State of Alaska (State) expense, and returned to the community nearest to the place of death; and
- WHEREAS:** The SMEO holds all remains pending a complete examination, and, upon completion, will only release the remains to the family if the decedent's next-of-kin signs an Authorization For Release of Remains Form (RAF); and
- WHEREAS:** The RAF permits such release to a funeral home or the decedent's next-of-kin, but if no form is executed within 10 days, the SMEO automatically releases the remains to a funeral home — thus, the completion of the form is critical; and
- WHEREAS:** Costs of funeral homes are great, and borne solely by the decedent's family, including any and all costs associated with transport to and from the funeral home, Death Certificate preparation fees, embalming (which some commercial

air carriers require for return transport), as well as the increased cost of freight weight for the casket and body weight due to embalming; and

WHEREAS: The SMEO presently implies, through the RAF, that the funeral home option is the preferred choice for release, but shares no financial information with families regarding this and the next-of-kin option to help them better understand their choices; and

WHEREAS: AK SB 161/HB 301: Autopsies and Death Certificates bill (SB 161/HB 301), generally seeks to make minor changes to Alaska law regarding the autopsy and death certificate issuance process to benefit Alaska families, particularly rural Alaska Native families; and

WHEREAS: SB 161/HB 301 will reinforce and strengthen current provisions allowing for the SMEO to transport the remains to the decedent's family's home, as opposed to the place of death, so long as the family pays the difference in cost, which is more responsive to grieving families; and

WHEREAS: SB 161/HB 301 will require the SMEO to utilize existing technology, readily available in many rural health facilities to make a preliminary determination of whether the remains must be transported to the Anchorage for further examination, which will minimize stress for grieving families and save the State money; and

WHEREAS: SB 161/HB 301 will require the State to provide fair written communication through the RAF, and other communications, which better enables families to make informed decisions that align with Alaska Native cultural beliefs and budget constraints; and

WHEREAS: SB 161/HB 301 will require the SMEO to chill a body whenever it knows that the remains are to be transported back to a rural region via a commercial air carrier, which is necessary for human transport; and

WHEREAS: SB 161/HB 301 will allow for the issuance of copies of death certificates in-region if transport to Anchorage is not required, which provides a more natural process for grieving families, and allows Alaska Native organizations to extend benevolence benefits to more beneficiaries; and

WHEREAS: SB 161/HB 301 requires the SMEO to obtain a Burial Transit Permit when it knows that the remains will be transported via commercial air carrier to a rural region, which again alleviates stress for grieving families; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Directors of the Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc. that SB 161/HB 301 aligns with our mission to enhance and promote the cultural, economic, and political voice of the entire Alaska Native community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Alaska Federation of Natives strongly supports SB 161/HB 301.

Passed on February 25, 2014



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julie E. Kitka".

Julie Kitka
President