



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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March 3, 2014

Senator Donald Olson
Alaska Capitol, Room 508
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Subject: Support SB 161, Autopsies & Death Certificates

Dear Senator Olson:

The Alaska Commission on Aging is pleased to provide support for SB 161, as authored by you, to amend the duties and procedures of the State Medical Examiner's office to offer greater support to families who are grieving the unexpected loss of a loved one.

Death of a loved one imparts significant personal and financial loss to the family survivors. Current law requires deaths occurring outside of a medical facility to be reported to the Medical Examiner's Office located in Anchorage in order to establish the cause of death and issue a death certificate. This process can be complicated, stressful, and cause a financial burden to rural families who may be on the hook for funeral home services when they think they have no other options. Without a death certificate, a family cannot apply for death benefits from the Division of Public Assistance to pay for the cost of funeral services.

SB 161 provides compassionate and common sense solutions to expedite the current autopsy and issuance of the death certificate. The bill allows death certificates to be issued in-region, if transport to Anchorage is not required by using locally available technology, and allows Tribal officials to declare death and complete the death certificate form in consultation with the Medical Examiner's office. In addition, SB 161 promotes improved communication to families regarding choices they have for the care of their loved ones' remains.

Thank you for your leadership on SB 161.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Mary E. Shields".

Mary E. Shields
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Denise Daniello".

Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director