



# Alaska State Legislature

## Representative Matt Claman

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### **Sponsor Statement**

#### House Bill 20

House Bill 20 expands the number of people eligible to solemnize (i.e. commemorate or memorialize) a marriage. Currently, religious leaders, judicial officers of the state, and individuals who have become “marriage commissioners” have the authority to marry individuals in Alaska. This group specifically includes:

- Ministers;
- Priests;
- Rabbis;
- Commissioned officers of the Salvation Army;
- Principal officers or elders of recognized churches or congregations that traditionally do not have regular ministers, priests, or rabbis;
- Marriage commissioners; and
- Judicial officers of the state.

House Bill 20 adds language to include elected officials, appointed or elected, to the group of individuals with the authority to solemnize a marriage. Currently, anyone can perform a marriage ceremony as long as they first obtain a marriage commissioner appointment from the Alaska Court System, which can be time consuming and includes providing the court with personal information and paying \$25.

This bill expands the individuals with authority to perform marriage ceremonies to include officials who hold public office and have sworn to uphold the constitution and the law. The bill has real practical advantages, particularly in rural communities. For example, if a couple in a remote Alaskan village are set to be married on a date and the minister becomes ill, the local mayor or assembly person could perform the marriage on short notice. In addition, couples who may not be affiliated with a particular religious organization would be able to have an elected official perform their wedding without having to go through the time-consuming of arranging for a marriage commissioner appointment for another person.

Finally, the bill reduces the cost of operating the court system by allowing elected officials to perform some of the work currently performed by judges and magistrates.