

Re: HB 23 and SB 48, Insurance for Dependents of Line of Duty Death State Troopers/Police/Firefighters.

Chairpersons and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Brandy Johnson. I am testifying in support of HB 23 and SB 48 on behalf of myself, my three daughters, my deceased husband, Scott Johnson, surviving families of past and future line of duty death state troopers as well as law enforcement families in the state of Alaska.

On May 1st, 2014, my husband, Sgt. Scott Johnson and Trooper Gabe Rich were murdered while in the performance of their job as Alaska State Troopers in Tanana, Alaska.

Scott had worked as a state trooper for over 21 years with a total of over 23 years vested in the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS). He could have retired with 20 years of service. However, Scott and I decided he should work another 5 years to gain the medical benefits for our family at the 25 year mark as a Tier II employee. It was while trying to obtain this promised benefit goal that Scott was ambushed and killed while in the performance of his duties as an Alaska State Trooper. Scott would have retired this past October with major medical benefits for himself and our family.

I had asked the state troopers assisting me after Scott was killed if my family still had health insurance. I initially was told I was set for life by one Lieutenant. However, that was not the case. I was later told that my family's benefits would expire at the end of the month. I was disappointed and angry. My choices were to pay \$1,150 per month for the retirement major medical health care that we would have received in a year and a half at no cost as a retirement benefit or \$1,700 for full coverage COBRA.

What is frustrating, is that the person who shot my husband to death and his father who desecrated my husband's dead body, while incarcerated, have medical care available at no cost to them as their families also have free health care.

Scott always took his responsibilities very seriously to protect the people of Alaska. I had believed upon his death, the State would also take responsibility to now take care of his family. Graciously, the State of Alaska has these past two and a half years until the gap in law could be resolved.

Our family has paid the price for this benefit. We have paid into the PERS retirement system, we have paid with the endless callouts. Whether it be a K9, S.E.R.T or one of the many other specialized emergency responses Scott was involved with. This is called, to give of yourself for the sake of others.

I personally prefer and am advocating for the House bill over the Senate bill. I understand that both the bills provide coverage unless another means becomes available. However, the Senate bill only provides coverage to a surviving spouse for ten years after a line of duty death. The reasoning behind the ten year limit is unclear to me and I haven't received an explanation for the limit. Not providing coverage to the sole surviving parent responsible for surviving children dumbfounds me. Currently, there is a surviving spouse who would not be covered in ten years and still have four children in the house to care and provide for.

I also would like to state my concern over one word in the SB 48 legislation. The word is, "may" on page 4, line 10. As a surviving spouse, I wouldn't want to hear that a municipality "may elect to participate". I have been left wondering about so much in regards to life. By changing one word to "shall" would provide a great sense of security and comfort to past and future surviving spouses.

I am here today asking for your support of HB 23. Both bills are more than what I have advocated the legislature for as a health benefit. These bills provide full coverage health insurance that would take care of young surviving families that need well child check ups. The retirement health care plan was not a long term solution. It was a "band-aide" so to say and a safety net in case of a major medical emergency.

These bills will ensure that another surviving spouse does not have to experience what I have. They will have the assurance that their children will be taken care of if there was a health emergency.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,
Brandy Johnson