

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

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Sponsor Statement | HB 235 The North Star Medal

HB 235 creates a rare and high honor to be awarded by the State of Alaska to first responders who are injured or killed while exhibiting great courage in the service of their fellow Alaskans. The North Star Medal is reserved for firefighters, peace officers, first responders, and search and rescue volunteers.

The idea for the bill came from Representative Bob Lynn, the former chair of the House State Affairs Committee, who envisioned the award as “a small thanksgiving” for the valor and sacrifice shown by these men and women.

One comparable award currently exists. The State Medal for Heroism was created by the legislature in 1965 to recognize the heroic and valorous deed of saving a life. In contrast to the North Star Medal, the Medal for Heroism can be awarded to any Alaskan, and has been awarded to individuals of all ages for what are often spontaneous acts of bravery. For example, the Medal for Heroism was awarded to a 10-year-old boy in Nome who lost his life rescuing a woman from a burning house in 1984, and to others who have saved people from drowning, or from death and injury in the aftermath of airplane and car crashes.

The North Star Medal does not duplicate this award; while the recipients of the State Medal for Heroism have responded to extraordinary events with courage, the North Star Medal honors those individuals who show up each day knowing that they could be asked to give their lives to protect and serve their fellow Alaskans. Other states such as Idaho, Illinois, Oregon, and Texas have similar awards that honor first responders for meritorious conduct and/or death or injury in the line of duty.

Nominations for the North Star Medal can originate within communities and organizations, and will be passed on to the highest ranking supervisor in the department or organization, who will then make recommendations to the Commissioner of Public Safety. After consideration, the Commissioner of Public Safety will submit the names of the nominees for the award to the Governor.

At a ceremony held no more than once a year, the Governor will present the recipient of the North Star Medal with a ribbon, a medal, and a citation. If the honoree is no longer living or cannot accept the award, the next of kin may accept it on their behalf.

The North Star Medal is a sign of gratitude from the people of Alaska to first responders whose dedication is a constant in a changing world.