

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senator David Wilson

Sponsor Statement

Senate Bill 38

"An Act establishing the crime of interference with emergency communications."

Senate Bill 38 establishes the offense of interference with emergency communications. This statute would apply when a person: repeatedly makes 911 calls to report something they know has already been reported, repeatedly calls 911 when there is no emergency, or harasses or threatens a 911 operator.

Interference with emergency communications -- the misuse, abuse, and disruption of 911 dispatch centers -- is a problem that severely impacts public safety and emergency response by delaying responses to real emergencies. It is prevalent at dispatch centers across Alaska and must be addressed.

During these disruptive events, other urgent emergency calls must be placed on hold or delayed to meet standards; industry standards are that all 911 calls must be answered within 15-20 seconds. A dispatcher could be required to place the parent of a choking child on hold to answer repeated calls from a harassing individual who is not in need of emergency services, delaying necessary life-saving measures. Under the language in the bill, that harasser could be charged. Currently, state statute does not address harassing behavior specific to 911 dispatch centers, nor does it give law enforcement adequate recourse to stop the behavior.

This problem is not unique to Alaska. Other states have developed legislation that makes interfering with emergency communications an arrestable offense -- which is the most effective way to stop the interference -- thus allowing 911 telecommunicators to focus on legitimate emergencies.

Please contact Jasmin Martin in my office at (907)465-8165 or by email at Jasmin.Martin@akleg.gov for more information. I respectfully ask for your support of this legislation.

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