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SB 9 - Sponsor Statement

SURRENDER OF INFANTS; INF. SAFETY DEVICE

“An Act relating to the surrender of infants; and providing for an effective date.”

In 2008 Alaska enacted its safe surrender law to ensure that surrendered infants receive immediate care for their safety and provide protections for the relinquishing parent, thereby reduce potential infant death due to illegal abandonment. While nine infants have been surrendered since the safe surrender statute was enacted, the state of Alaska has recently had several instances of infants being illegally abandoned, sometimes leading to death. Traditional safe surrender laws require a parent to directly relinquish an infant to another individual. Yet shame, fear, and potential recognition may pose potential barriers for a parent in crisis to utilize the safe surrender law as it still requires the surrender to be made in person.

Infant safety devices offer a possible solution to protect both relinquishing parents and infants. Infant safety devices allow a parent to surrender an infant anonymously through a climate-controlled device at a designated facility. Currently, twenty-two states authorize infant safety devices. Senate Bill Nine would authorize the use of infant safety devices as an additional method of infant relinquishment under the safe surrender laws. These devices would safely hold an infant with an automatic lock and constant video surveillance while immediately alerting appropriate personnel of the surrender. Infant safety devices would be placed in conspicuous areas with appropriate signage as determined by the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS). An infant safety device may be located at hospital, emergency department, freestanding birth center, office of a private physician, rural health clinic, municipal police department, state trooper post, fire department, or other facility designated by the DFCS commissioner.

The ability to relinquish an infant to a safe location rather than an individual allows additional anonymity for the relinquishing parent while still ensuring that surrendered infants receive immediate medical care. Thus, SB 9 preserve the protection of surrendered infants while also addressing the potential barriers of shame, fear, and potential recognition of a relinquishing parent during a time of crisis.

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