

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

February 22, 2011

1:04 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Dan Saddler, Co-Chair  
Representative Steve Thompson, Co-Chair  
Representative Carl Gatto, Vice Chair  
Representative Bob Miller

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Alan Austerman  
Representative Bob Lynn  
Representative Sharon Cissna

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 129

"An Act relating to providing a death certificate for a deceased veteran without charge."

- MOVED CSHB 129(MLV) OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 129

SHORT TITLE: DECEASED VETERAN DEATH CERTIFICATE

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) GRUENBERG

01/28/11	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/28/11	(H)	MLV, FIN
02/22/11	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM CAPITOL 120

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE MAX GRUENBERG  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced HB 129 as the prime sponsor.

GRETCHEN STAFT, Staff  
Representative Max Gruenberg  
Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered a question during the hearing on HB 129.

WARD HURLBURT, MD, Director and Chief Medical Officer  
Central Office  
Division of Public Health  
Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 129.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CO-CHAIR STEVE THOMPSON** called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. Representatives Thompson, Saddler, Gatto, and Miller were present at the call to order. Representatives Lynn and Cissna were excused.

**HB 129-DECEASED VETERAN DEATH CERTIFICATE**

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CO-CHAIR THOMPSON announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 129, "An Act relating to providing a death certificate for a deceased veteran without charge."

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CO-CHAIR SADDLER moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 129, Version 27-LS0450\M, Bullard, 2/17/11, as the working document. There being no objection, Version M was before the committee.

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REPRESENTATIVE MAX GRUENBERG, Alaska State Legislature, stated that the proposed legislation provides a limited number of free death certificates to veterans' families in order to allow those who are dealing with the estate of a veteran to apply for and obtain governmental benefits, but not for other purposes. The legislation is modeled on existing Arizona law, and will provide additional assistance to families that are handling the affairs of a deceased veteran. Representative Gruenberg related a personal story that illustrated the benefit of this legislation.

He noted that the legislation has advanced in previous sessions, but "ran out of time," and he is not aware of any opposition. He called attention to the zero fiscal note and pointed out that there will be a loss of revenue estimated at up to \$75,000. At the suggestion of H.D. "Dan" McCrummen, MCPO, USCG (Retired), Version M makes two changes: references to the Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserves were omitted in the CS because they are "technically in the armed services," and thereby are already included in the bill; the Alaska Army National Guard and the Alaska Air National Guard were eliminated in the CS, and National Guard was substituted.

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CO-CHAIR SADDLER asked whether Dan McCrummen serves on the Alaska Veterans Advisory Council board.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG said he was unsure. In further response to Co-Chair Saddler, he indicated that death certificates can be obtained at a cost of \$25 each for purposes not applicable to the bill.

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REPRESENTATIVE MILLER inquired as to how many copies could be requested at no charge, and whether the legislation specifies who is qualified to request copies at no charge.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG called attention to page 2, line 22, and said:

The bureau shall issue one certified copy of the death certificate, free, to an eligible recipient. An eligible recipient is defined on page 2, sub[paragraph] (A), (7)(A), lines 26 and following up to the top of page 3, so in other words, a surviving spouse or other relative - each one could get one - ... any heir, a devisee, and administrators, et cetera.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG added that the estimate from the Bureau of Vital Statistics, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), has been revised to an average of three or four copies per person, since these copies could only be used to apply for governmental benefits.

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CO-CHAIR SADDLER observed the fiscal note analysis reflected families have been known to request up to 40 copies, which would increase the cost to the state.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG said he was unaware of any reason for a request for 40 copies, as "there are just a few governmental agencies that would provide benefits dependent upon a death certificate."

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GRETCHEN STAFF, Staff, Representative Max Gruenberg, added that unless 40 different eligible recipients requested a death certificate, there would be no additional cost to the state, or a loss of revenue, because each eligible recipient is entitled to one certified copy.

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CO-CHAIR SADDLER asked if the death certificates were "standard-issue government" certificates without decoration.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG indicated yes.

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CO-CHAIR THOMPSON opened public testimony.

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WARD HURLBURT, MD, Director and Chief Medical Officer, Central Office, Division of Public Health, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), stated the administration has no position on HB 129, and he reviewed the proposed legislation. The experience of his division is that the average number of requests for a death certificate is 5, although the average of 3-4 requests was used in the calculation of the fiscal impact of the bill. He advised that requests for free certificates from family members are projected at between 1-5,000 per year; furthermore, the division expects that as awareness of the legislation heightens, the impact would grow and the reduction in fees to the Bureau of Vital Statistics would be \$75,000 in Fiscal Year 2012 (FY 12), and then increase over the next five subsequent years to \$100,000 in reduced income. Dr. Hurlburt

cautioned that to maintain current staffing levels at the bureau, income from general fund (GF) appropriations and fees is necessary. He stated his significant concern that the bureau would not be able to maintain its current level of service with the loss of fees unless GF appropriations balance its budget.

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CO-CHAIR SADDLER surmised a party that requests 40 death certificates paid for them.

DR. HURLBURT answered yes. He added that the bureau does not ask for the reason for a request.

CO-CHAIR SADDLER asked for an estimated fee schedule that would make up for the lost revenue.

DR. HURLBURT estimated that a fee increase of greater than \$10 for non-veteran certificates would be required. He offered to provide the exact calculation.

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CO-CHAIR THOMPSON, upon determining no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony.

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CO-CHAIR SADDLER moved to report the proposed CS for HB 129, Version 27-LS0450\M, Bullard, 2/17/11, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHB 129(MLV) was reported from the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

The committee took a brief at-ease.

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#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 1:24 p.m.