

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

March 22, 2012

9:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Bill Wielechowski, Chair
Senator Albert Kookesh
Senator Kevin Meyer
Senator Cathy Giessel

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Joe Paskvan, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 132

"An Act relating to requirements for persons holding provisional drivers' licenses; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 34(STA) AM

Urging the United States Congress to fund all the facilities and vessels necessary for the United States Coast Guard to fulfill its Arctic missions, including icebreakers and an Arctic Coast Guard base.

- MOVED CSHJR 34(STA) AM OUT OF COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 129(FIN)

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

- HEARD & HELD

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 180(FIN)

"An Act authorizing the Department of Administration to note a person's status as a retired veteran or a veteran discharged under honorable conditions on the person's driver's license or identification card, to provide certain information to the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs, and to charge a fee for replacing a valid driver's license or identification card with a new license or card that includes the veteran designation; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 132

SHORT TITLE: PROVISIONAL DRIVER'S LICENSE STICKER

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) MEYER BY REQUEST

04/16/11 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/16/11 (S) STA, FIN
03/22/12 (S) STA AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: HJR 34

SHORT TITLE: COAST GUARD ICEBREAKERS & ARCTIC BASE

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) HERRON

02/03/12 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/03/12 (H) MLV, STA
02/16/12 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM CAPITOL 120
02/16/12 (H) Moved CSHJR 34(MLV) Out of Committee
02/16/12 (H) MINUTE(MLV)
02/17/12 (H) MLV RPT CS(MLV) 4DP
02/17/12 (H) DP: MILLER, LYNN, CISSNA, THOMPSON
02/21/12 (H) STA AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
02/21/12 (H) Moved CSHJR 34(STA) Out of Committee
02/21/12 (H) MINUTE(STA)
02/22/12 (H) STA RPT CS(STA) 4DP 1NR 2AM
02/22/12 (H) DP: P.WILSON, SEATON, PETERSEN, LYNN
02/22/12 (H) NR: GRUENBERG
02/22/12 (H) AM: JOHANSEN, KELLER
02/29/12 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
02/29/12 (H) VERSION: CSHJR 34(STA) AM
03/02/12 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/02/12 (S) STA
03/22/12 (S) STA AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

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
02/22/11 (H) Moved CSHB 129(MLV) Out of Committee
02/22/11 (H) MINUTE(MLV)
02/23/11 (H) MLV RPT CS(MLV) 3DP 1NR

02/23/11 (H) DP: GATTO, MILLER, THOMPSON
02/23/11 (H) NR: SADDLER
04/09/11 (H) FIN AT 1:00 PM HOUSE FINANCE 519
04/09/11 (H) Moved CSHB 129(FIN) Out of Committee
04/09/11 (H) MINUTE(FIN)
04/11/11 (H) FIN RPT CS(FIN) 11DP
04/11/11 (H) DP: FAIRCLOUGH, GUTTENBERG, T.WILSON,
GARA, JOULE, NEUMAN, COSTELLO, EDGMON,
04/11/11 (H) DOOGAN, STOLTZE, THOMAS
04/13/11 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
04/13/11 (H) VERSION: CSHB 129(FIN)
04/14/11 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/14/11 (S) STA, FIN
03/22/12 (S) STA AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: HB 180

SHORT TITLE: VETERAN DESIGNATION ON DRIVER'S LICENSE

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) SADDLER

03/09/11 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/09/11 (H) MLV, STA
03/17/11 (H) MLV AT 1:00 PM CAPITOL 120
03/17/11 (H) Moved CSHB 180(MLV) Out of Committee
03/17/11 (H) MINUTE(MLV)
03/18/11 (H) MLV RPT CS(MLV) NT 5DP 1DNP
03/18/11 (H) DP: LYNN, GATTO, MILLER, SADDLER,
THOMPSON
03/18/11 (H) DNP: AUSTERMAN
03/18/11 (H) FIN REFERRAL ADDED AFTER STA
03/31/11 (H) STA AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/31/11 (H) Moved CSHB 180(STA) Out of Committee
03/31/11 (H) MINUTE(STA)
04/01/11 (H) STA RPT CS(STA) NT 4DP 2AM
04/01/11 (H) DP: GRUENBERG, SEATON, PETERSEN, LYNN
04/01/11 (H) AM: JOHANSEN, P.WILSON
02/06/12 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM HOUSE FINANCE 519
02/06/12 (H) Moved CSHB 180(FIN) Out of Committee
02/06/12 (H) MINUTE(FIN)
02/08/12 (H) FIN RPT CS(FIN) NT 10DP
02/08/12 (H) DP: FAIRCLOUGH, T.WILSON, NEUMAN,
COSTELLO, EDGMON, GUTTENBERG, GARA,
JOULE,
02/08/12 (H) STOLTZE, THOMAS
02/10/12 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
02/10/12 (H) VERSION: CSHB 180(FIN)
02/13/12 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/13/12 (S) STA, FIN

03/22/12

(S)

STA AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

BOB PAWLOWSKI, Staff
Senator Kevin Meyer
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Explained SB 132 on behalf of the sponsor.

WHITNEY BREWSTER, Director
Division of Motor Vehicles
Department of Administration
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information related to SB 132.

JESSICA LUIKEN, Student
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information about SB 132, which she authored.

LIEUTENANT RODNEY DIAL, Deputy Commissioner
Division of Alaska State Troopers
Department of Public Safety
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information related to SB 132.

ROB EARL, Staff
Representative Bob Herron
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Explained HJR 34 on behalf of the House State Affairs Committee, sponsor of HJR 34.

JEFFERY GARRETT, Retired
U.S. Coast Guard
Seattle, Washington

POSITION STATEMENT: Offered to answer questions on HJR 34.

REPRESENTATIVE MAX GRUENBERG
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 129.

PHILLIP MITCHELL, Section Chief
Bureau of Vital Statistics
Division of Public Health

Department of Health and Social Services
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information related to HB 129.

MARIE DARLIN, Member
AARP

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 129.

REPRESENTATIVE DAN SADDLER
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 180.

RIC DAVIDGE, President
Alaska Chapter,
Vietnam Veterans of America
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 180.

MERCEDES ANGERMAN, Program Coordinator
Office of Veteran's Affairs
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
Fort Richardson, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 180.

WHITNEY BREWSTER, Director
Division of Motor Vehicles
Department of Administration
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information related to SB 132 and to HB 180.

JOSEPH FIELDS, III, Chairman
Alaska Veterans Advisory Council
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 180.

TIM ARMSTRONG, Chief of Staff
Department of Military Order of the Purple Heart
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 180.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:02:25 AM](#)

CHAIR BILL WIELECHOWSKI called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Meyer, Giessel, and Chair Wielechowski. Senator Kookesh arrived shortly thereafter.

SB 132-PROVISIONAL DRIVER'S LICENSE STICKER

[9:02:32 AM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI announced that the first bill before the committee would be SB 132, which would direct the Department of Motor Vehicles to produce a "provisional driver's sticker" for drivers between the ages of 16 and 18.

SENATOR KEVIN MEYER, sponsor of SB 132, introduced the bill. He related that the bill came to his attention from Jessica Luiken, a student in Anchorage, who researched a high school project on a provisional driver's sticker. He shared his experience taking a driver's education course when he was in high school. Since those classes no longer exist, he thought the idea of a provisional sticker had a lot of merit.

[9:04:53 AM](#)

BOB PAWLOWSKI, staff, Senator Kevin Meyer, explained SB 132 on behalf of the sponsor. He read from the following sponsor statement:

SB 132 provides for a 'provisional driver's license sticker' for drivers between 16 and 18 years of age who are driving under the Alaska Graduated License Program. The Alaska Graduated License Program requires one to have an 'instruction permit' at least 6 months prior to testing for a driver's license. Upon receipt of the license and between the ages of 16 and 18 years old, the driver is driving under a 'provisional driver's license'. This provisional license is in effect for 6 months or longer, based on any motor vehicle violations during the provisional period. The Alaska Graduated License Program remains in effect until one's 18th birthday. Upon obtaining a provisional license, under SB 132, the driver would obtain a sticker that shows that the vehicle is being driven by a driver with a 'provisional' license.

If enacted, SB 132 would add a new subsection to AS 28.15.055 (Alaska's Provisional License Law) establishing a provisional license sticker and the responsibility of the driver to display it in the car

they are operating. SB 132 would continue the responsibilities of the driver and the other responsible parties established in the 2005 Provisional Driver's License Law.

We all know the challenges of Alaska driving conditions. Winter cold weather, darkness, snow berms, frosted windows, and low sun level and glare all add to challenges we are all experienced with. Similarly, our extended summer light and activities bring their own risks with tiredness, crowded roads, and distractions. SB 132 simply helps experienced drivers recognize the inexperienced driver by providing for a permit for drivers 'provisionally licensed'. Recognizing inexperienced driving as a step to improving driving safety was a reason behind the Alaska Graduated License Program. By adding a "provisional sticker" to the car, other drivers can respect the inexperience the new driver has and drive appropriately.

Finally, the bill provides guidance to the Department of Motor Vehicles and Department of Public Safety on issuing and enforcing the 'provisional driver's sticker'.

This bill was researched and proposed by Jessica Luiken, a senior in Alaska's Home School Program. Jessica is here to share her research and reasons for proposing to our office, SB 132.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked for a solution if a young driver's family has multiple cars.

MR. PAWLOWSKI said that DMV is researching how best to handle that issue.

WHITNEY BREWSTER, Director, Division of Motor Vehicles, Department of Administration, provided information related to SB 132. She addressed Chair Wielechowski's question. She explained that DMV has researched the use of the provisional sticker and she suggested various methods of displaying them on multiple vehicles. She noted there are 6,300 provisional licenses and it would be inexpensive to implement the program at 20 cents per sticker. She said the bill allows DMV the flexibility in offering more than one sticker.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked how much it would cost the teens.

MS. BREWSTER related that the sticker costs 20 cents and it would be less than \$1,000 for DMV to administer the program.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if there would be a charge.

MS. BREWSTER replied that DMV has the option to charge a fee, but does not intend to charge it.

[9:11:35 AM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if other states have this type of sticker.

MS. BREWSTER said she was aware that other states do have them. She suggested Ms. Luiken could answer that question.

SENATOR KOOKESH asked how big the sticker would be.

MS. BREWSTER suggested it would be small, possibly 3" by 10", and easily seen in the back window by law enforcement. She noted she would work with law enforcement to determine the size.

SENATOR KOOKESH thought the sticker would be hard to see. He said he didn't understand how the sticker would make roads safer.

[9:13:15 AM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked Ms. Brewster if she thought the fine of \$300 was appropriate.

MS. BREWSTER replied that the fine for failure to follow the restrictions of a provisional license is \$200 and a 2-point ticket. She opined the \$300 fine was "in the same ballpark." She suggested the legislature could change that amount.

SENATOR KOOKESH thought a \$300 fine was excessive. He did not like the idea of taking points off for not displaying a sticker.

MS. BREWSTER said she envisioned the provisional sticker being distributed by DMV when the provisional license was issued. She said fines and point restrictions were outside DMV's scope. She suggested contacting law enforcement regarding that.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if loss of points was part of the penalty for not having the sticker displayed.

MS. BREWSTER did not believe so. She thought point penalties were reserved for moving violations.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if the administration supports bill.

MS. BREWSTER reported that the department is neutral.

[9:16:14 AM](#)

JESSICA LUIKEN, student, testified in favor of SB 132, which she authored. She began by thanking the committee for allowing her to testify on SB 132. She thanked Senator Meyer and his staff, and Representative Millett and her staff for making her project possible. She gave a brief history of the bill, which began as a Juneau Close Up project.

MS. LUIKEN presented a slide show about student drivers and their habits. She discussed the causes of death among teenagers between 1999 and 2006. Out of 48 percent of unintentional injuries, 73 percent were from motor vehicle traffic accidents. She shared statistics about the high numbers of fatal crashes in Alaska for drivers 14-16, from 2004 to 2008. She reported on the ages and percentage of drivers involved in crashes between 2002 and 2011.

She noted the traits of provisional license drivers that have an effect on their poor driving records. She said novice drivers are more likely to be nervous, due to the fact that they are driving by themselves for the first time, they lack experience, and many lack sound judgment. Frequent adverse weather conditions such as rain, snow, and ice are but a few examples of Alaska's diverse weather conditions, which also have an impact on youthful drivers. Alaska also has dangerous roads and wildlife to look out for.

MS. LUIKEN proposed a solution of having provisional drivers display stickers in the rear window of their cars to show that a provisional driver is operating the vehicle. British Columbia, Newfoundland, Yukon, Australia, and England, as well as New Jersey, have laws that require provisional stickers.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if the red sticker in the picture indicates the provisional sticker.

MS. LUIKEN said yes. Teen drivers in New Jersey are required to display a red decal on the back of their license plates.

She showed pictures of various methods of displaying stickers.

9:20:18 AM

MS. LUIKEN defended the provisional sticker solution for the following reasons: it will impress upon other drivers to be more cautious driving near a novice driver; it will assist law enforcement officers in implementing the law as it relates to provisional drivers.

She suggested as a possible enforcement regulation, a fine of not more than \$300. She gave an example of the steps to be taken after the bill is passed: the state will supply DMV with stickers to distribute to those persons who acquire a provisional license; those applying for a provisional license will pay for the sticker and place it on the rear window of the operating vehicle.

She concluded that teen drivers with provisional licenses are statistically more hazardous to themselves and others and should be required to identify their status in order to reduce the number of accidents and infractions and help save lives.

9:22:07 AM

SENATOR KOOKESH asked why this bill would reduce accidents and infractions in Alaska.

MS. LUIKEN said the idea was to notify experienced drivers that an inexperienced driver was near. She shared her own experience as a novice driver. The sticker would also allow law enforcement officers to identify provisional licensed drivers.

SENATOR KOOKESH asked if Ms. Luiken had researched accidents by provisional drivers.

MS. LUIKEN said no.

SENATOR KOOKESH assumed there was no evidence whether other drivers or provisional drivers caused an accident.

MS. LUIKEN explained that she is not suggesting that provisional drivers caused accidents, but that they should be identified as provisional drivers in order to reduce accidents.

SENATOR KOOKESH did not see the point. He requested more evidence.

MS. LUIKEN reiterated that the goal of the bill is to ensure that accidents won't happen and that restrictions required of

provisional drivers will be enforced. She said she has found little evidence to show the causes of accidents by provisional drivers.

[9:24:44 AM](#)

SENATOR MEYER thought the bill would be very helpful in urban areas, and if other drivers know a young driver is near, they may cut them some slack. He pointed out that kids no longer receive driver's training. He related that insurance companies advocated very strongly for provisional licenses and would be supportive of SB 132.

He suggested the idea must work because other states use it. He asked if there were statistics to justify its use in other states. He suggested using an 'N' for new drivers on the sticker.

MS. LUIKEN spoke of New Jersey's policy which was implemented in 2010.

SENATOR GIESSEL said one of the strong points of the argument is that driver education cars say "student driver" because it is important to identify beginning drivers. She noted the presence of "crazy drivers" in Anchorage.

SENATOR KOOKESH maintained that the provisional license in Angoon, Alaska, is not necessary. He pointed out that rural Alaska is different and people cannot afford a \$300 fine. He gave another example of Beaver, Alaska.

[9:29:05 AM](#)

MS. LUIKEN clarified that the fine is only assessed if the driver does not have a sticker. DMV would provide the sticker when the driver receives the provisional license.

SENATOR KOOKESH maintained his arguments.

SENATOR MEYER suggested that the amount of the fine could be amended, but the bill deals with a public safety issue and he opined that the subject is important and warrants the committee's time.

SENATOR KOOKESH thought the discussion was part of the committee process. He said he was opposed to unnecessary regulations.

[9:32:06 AM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if there are any statistics to show that the sticker reduces accidents.

MS. LUIKEN explained that she was unable to get statistics because the sticker has not been implemented in the United States, except for recently in New Jersey.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if there was any data from other countries. He asked what percentage of provisional drivers are involved in accidents.

MS. LUIKEN replied that she does not have that information.

[9:33:53 AM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether the problem is young drivers or new drivers, no matter the age.

MS. LUIKEN thought the situation was different for drivers over 21 because they can drink. She thought the accident rate for older new drivers would be higher than for young drivers who are required to be accompanied by an adult.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if the driving age is appropriate or if it should be raised.

MS. LUIKEN thought it was appropriate.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if the \$300 fine is excessive.

MS. LUIKEN replied that bill says the fine is not to exceed \$300, and the House State Affairs Committee amended the bill to say a "secondary stop" with a \$200 fine and a 2-point reduction.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if the sticker would be required for motorcycles, snow machines, and other vehicles.

MS. LUIKEN said just cars and trucks.

[9:36:06 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL referred to page 3 of the slide presentation with statistics of accidents by drivers who hold learners permits, ages 14 - 16. She thought that was good information. She said it is hard to demonstrate the effects of prevention. She asked Ms. Luiken if she has talked with her peers about the provisional sticker.

MS. LUIKEN replied that she had not, but thought that they might not like it. She also said the original idea was geared toward drivers with a learners permit, but it seemed more beneficial for provisional drivers who are driving without an adult present.

SENATOR GIESSEL asked if driver's education companies are in favor of the sticker.

MS. LUIKEN offered to provide that information.

SENATOR KOOKESH referred to the last sentence of paragraph (b), "a person violating this section may not be convicted . . ." and asked if Ms. Luiken envisioned the involvement of a court.

MS. LUIKEN believed a court would be involved if the person was pulled over and was required to provide proof of having the sticker.

SENATOR KOOKESH pointed out the cost of court expenses.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI noted there was one "free pass"; however, on the second violation a court could be involved.

MS. LUIKEN agreed.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI read, "However, a person charged with violating this section may not be convicted if the person has not previously been arrested, charged, or cited for a violation of this section."

[9:39:54 AM](#)

LIEUTENANT RODNEY DIAL, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Alaska State Troopers, Department of Public Safety, provided information related to SB 132. He said that the department was neutral on the bill. He explained that the fine is set by the Supreme Court and \$300 is the maximum fine. The first offense would be a correctable citation if the individual was complying with the requirements of the bill. There is not a mandatory court appearance, but a person could contest the citation and go to court. He said the potential benefits from the bill would be to help identify vehicles operated in violation of provisional restrictions. For example, if a provisional driver was driving between the hours of 1:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m., they would be stopped. If the bill is kept at a secondary violation, there would have to be another reason for a traffic stop, not just to check for a sticker.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked Lt. Dial if he believed the bill would make Alaska's roads safer.

LT. DIAL said the department had no opinion.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI closed public testimony.

[9:43:26 AM](#)

MS. LUIKEN said she believed that the cost of not passing the bill would be someone's life and the benefit of passing the bill would be saving that life. She urged passage of SB 132.

[SB 132 was held in committee.]

HJR 34-COAST GUARD ICEBREAKERS & ARCTIC BASE

[9:44:42 AM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI announced that the next bill would be HJR 34, a resolution that urges the President and Congress to fund a Coast Guard Arctic Base and icebreakers. The committee has heard and reported out the Senate companion bill.

ROB EARL, staff, Representative Bob Herron, explained HJR 34 on behalf of the House State Affairs Committee, sponsor of HJR 34. He pointed out that the crux of the resolution is on page 4, line 21, which asks Congress to fund icebreakers and an Arctic Coast Guard base.

He drew attention to the one difference in the current version of the bill, as compared to the Senate version. On page 4, line 11, the phrase "strategically important" has been inserted before "Bering Strait" and clarifies the term "choke point" on line 12. "Choke point" is a military term of art meaning a geographic feature, such as a valley or a strait, which would require any armed force passing through to present a much narrower front, thereby decreasing its combative power. He stressed the importance of the Bering Strait to the future of the Arctic.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI referred to previous public testimony and opened public testimony.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI opined that HJR was an important resolution in that it would facilitate icebreakers in the Arctic.

JEFFERY GARRETT, retired, U.S. Coast Guard, offered to answer questions on HJR 34.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI closed public testimony

SENATOR GIESSEL moved to report CS for HJR 34, version [B.A.] from committee with individual recommendations and the attached zero fiscal note. There being no objection, CSHJR 34(STA)am was reported from the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee.

HB 129-DECEASED VETERAN DEATH CERTIFICATE

9:50:05 AM

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI announced that HB 129 was before the committee. The bill would give family members of deceased veterans up to four certified copies of a death certificate for that veteran.

REPRESENTATIVE MAX GRUENBERG, sponsor of HB 129, introduced the bill. He stated that the bill provides that upon the death of a veteran, who is defined in the bill as a person who was on active duty at the time of their death, or had received an honorable or general discharge from the armed services, and was a resident of Alaska at the time of the individual's death. That person's estate would be entitled, at the time of death, to request, without charge, that the Bureau of Vital Statistics issue up to four certified copies of the death certificate for the purpose of establishing an eligibility requirement for a benefit related to the veteran.

He noted the bill has been around for four legislatures and has had no objection. There is a small fiscal note and the bill goes on to the Senate Finance Committee after this committee.

He explained that the definition of "benefit" is not limited to a governmental benefit and suggested it could be a life insurance policy. He stressed the importance of the estate having access to certified copies of the death certificate. He called four copies a modest number.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG noted that the House Finance Committee changed the number of copies to four, but neglected to change the title to match. The title change amendment would say "providing copies of" instead of "a copy", and there is also a draft Senate Concurrent Resolution pending.

9:54:06 AM

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked what the cost of a death certificate is.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG thought it was \$25.

PHILLIP MITCHELL, Section Chief, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Division of Public Health, Department of Health and Social Services, provided information related to HB 129. He agreed that the intent of the bill is to provide a public service for deceased veterans. It is similar to a bill previously introduced in the legislature. He explained that the administration has no position regarding the bill.

He related that the impact of the bill would be mostly financial and would be expected to grow as more people became aware of the new law. There has been a request by an estate for 40 or more death certificates, but the average number of requests is about five.

He reported that 30 percent of Alaskans are veterans and there are about 1,000 veteran deaths per year. The fee for the first copy of a death certificate is \$25, but it is \$20 for each subsequent copy. Assuming that three or four copies are issued per death, the impact would be that between 3,000 and 4,000 copies would be offered at no charge.

He pointed out that the department is not clear on what a "person" means in the resolution. He questioned if "a person" means only one individual, or if it means the wife, the brother, and the children. The fiscal note could change substantially, based on that definition.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked which line Mr. Mitchell was referring to.

MR. MITCHELL said line 23 on page 2.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if a wife could request four copies, and then a brother could also request four copies.

MR. MITCHELL continued to say that the department estimates that the bill will reduce fees usually collected by the Bureau of Vital Statistics for death certificates from about \$75,000 the first year and up to \$100,000 in the fifth year. About three percent of the Bureau's budget is based on general fund (GF) and the remainder of the budget is from fee-based, with the fees being built into the budget. The department submitted a fiscal

note to cover the costs of the decreased program receipts, which would need to be replaced by GF.

9:57:50 AM

SENATOR KOOKESH asked about requests from honorably discharged veterans.

MR. MITCHELL explained that those requests would require proof, such as a copy of the DD-214 or a military ID.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI added a driver's license to the examples, if HB 180 passes.

SENATOR KOOKESH asked how long it would take to get the certificates.

MR. MITCHELL replied that the Bureau would accept the person's military documentation, and it would take a very short amount of processing time, about ten minutes in person, and about two weeks to be mailed out.

9:59:04 AM

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI gave an example of an out-of-state veteran based in Alaska and killed in Afghanistan. He inquired if Alaska would issue the death certificate in that case.

MR. MITCHELL clarified that deaths are registered where they occur.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if it has to be a death that occurs in Alaska.

MR. MITCHELL said yes.

SENATOR MEYER asked if any of the certificates are free.

MR. MITCHELL responded that there was a fee for each certificate.

SENATOR MEYER asked if a family could request up to 10 death certificates.

MR. MITCHELL said they did receive a request once for 100 certificates, but average is about 5. The bill limits it to four.

SENATOR MEYER restated a concern about the number of certificates per person.

MR. MITCHELL said he agreed with Senator Meyer's conclusion.

[10:01:15 AM](#)

MARIE DARLIN, AARP, testified in support of HB 129. She related that Alaska has the highest per capita number of veterans in the U.S. She agreed that this bill was one more way to thank veterans for their service.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked for clarification of the definition of "person".

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG noted that it is the first time "person" has been questioned. He said the intent is a total of four certificates per death, regardless of how many requests there were. He offered to clear up the ambiguity of the language. He thought the other aspect under question was who would be entitled to claim the certificate. He asked Mr. Mitchell if the Division of Public Health has the authority to promulgate regulations.

MR. MITCHELL said yes.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG wanted to let the division determine who could claim the certificate.

MR. MITCHELL agreed that it would work to clarify what was meant by a "person".

SENATOR KOOKESH suggested amending the bill in committee. He offered a Conceptual Amendment:

That upon request and without charge, the Bureau shall issue up to four copies of a death certificate for the death of a veteran. Take out "to a person".

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI voiced approval of the suggestion.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG agreed.

[10:06:00 AM](#)

SENATOR MEYER questioned what the right number of certificates was. He wondered if there was research as to how other states handle this issue.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG explained that HB 129 was modeled after Arizona's law. He left the number up to the committee.

SENATOR MEYER stated he was fine with four.

SENATOR KOOKESH concluded that a person could get four free certificates, but any more would incur a cost.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG said yes.

[10:08:04 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL requested clarification of who could receive the certificate.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG clarified that the bill is directed to the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics, not to other states. He emphasized that the death has to occur in Alaska and the veteran must be an Alaska resident.

MR. MITCHELL added a scenario where out-of-state veterans would not qualify even if they died in Alaska.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI said HB 129 would be set aside.

HB 180-VETERAN DESIGNATION ON DRIVER'S LICENSE

[10:10:02 AM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI announced that the next bill before the committee would be HB 180, which allows the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to put veteran's information and status on driver's licenses.

REPRESENTATIVE DAN SADDLER, sponsor of HB 180, introduced the bill. He read from the following sponsor statement.

For the record, Rep. Dan Saddler, District 18. Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for hearing House Bill 180. This bill does two things:

First, it authorizes the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to designate a person's status as a veteran on a state-issued driver's license or ID card - but only if that person requests that designation. That designation would be the image of a U.S. flag. Having proof of veteran status on a durable, convenient card will help veterans to enjoy discounts offered by grateful businesses

Second, HB 180 authorizes DMV to provide the name & address of a person receiving a veteran's designation to the Department of Military & Veterans Affairs - but again, only if that person agrees. If he does, he'll have another chance at receiving important health and other benefits earned through his service

The bill has changed, and improved through the process. Both the designation and the address-sharing provisions are voluntary - while I believe the benefits are clear, we made it optional, out of respect for veterans' privacy and autonomy. The designation is specified as the U.S. Flag - this saves design costs. The cost for the cards was dropped from the usual \$15, down to \$5 - this is a service to vets, not a profit center for the state.

If you'll look at the packet, it documents support from Military and Veterans Affairs, Division of Motor Vehicles, representatives of veterans groups, business groups, and individual veterans.

To sum up: By giving Alaskans a way to carry reliable and convenient proof of their veteran status, HB 180 will help veterans enjoy the many benefits made available to them by a grateful state and nation.

[10:12:24 AM](#)

SENATOR MEYER asked what benefits veterans get with this license or card, and if a military ID would still be required.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER explained that the information would be put on the driver's license or ID card and there would not be an additional card issued. It would save the veteran from having to carry around a military ID or file. Benefits would include discounted or free death certificates, inclusion on a registry for purposes of veteran information notification, and retail discounts and offers.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI noted that a number of veteran's organizations support the bill. He maintained that the bill would make it easier for veterans to prove their veteran status.

He opened public testimony.

RIC DAVIDGE, President, Alaska Chapter, Vietnam Veterans of America, testified in support of HB 180. He related his experience with new information regarding exposure to Agent

Orange and other elements. There are delayed symptoms as a result of exposure to these elements. Knowing the information about a veteran's service can vastly assist with communicating information about possible exposure during their service. HB 180 allows for improved communication between veterans and DMV. The bill has been approved in 23 other states. It would provide veterans with a uniform ID and enable the state to notify veterans as new medical information becomes available.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI thanked Mr. Davidge for his hard work.

[10:17:01 AM](#)

MERCEDES ANGERMAN, Program Coordinator, Office of Veteran's Affairs, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, testified in support of HB 180. She said that another advantage of having the veteran designation on the driver's license was in order for emergency responders and law enforcement officials to recognize veterans during emergencies.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if the administration supports the bill.

MS. ANGERMAN said the Office of Veterans Affairs supports the bill.

[10:19:04 AM](#)

WHITNEY BREWSTER, Director, Division of Motor Vehicles, Department of Administration, provided information related to HB 180. She explained what the flag would look like on the license. She related that DMV would include the name and address of the card holder, as well as "veteran" on the license for further recognition. She said there could be a charge of \$5 for a replacement fee and \$15 at the time of expiration to renew the card.

[10:21:19 AM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked what the cost of replacing a lost license would be.

MS. BREWSTER said \$15.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked how much it would cost to replace a new veteran's card.

MS. BREWSTER said \$5.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked where in the bill the authority to designate "veteran" was. He wondered if additional legislative authority was needed.

MS. BREWSTER thought it could be handled in regulations. She anticipated working with MVA.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if the legislature needed to give authority to do so.

MS. BREWSTER replied that DMV has broad authority when it comes to promulgating regulations for driver licensing.

[10:23:26 AM](#)

JOSEPH FIELDS, III, Chair, Alaska Veterans Advisory Council, testified in support of HB 180. He drew attention to the word "or" on line 3 of the bill and asked if it should be "and". He suggested "veteran" should be on both cards. He spoke of the advantages of having veteran identification.

SENATOR KOOKESH thanked Mr. Fields for talking about having the designation on both the identification card and the license. He shared a personal story about an uncle who was a veteran and lived to be 102, and because he could no longer drive, he required another ID that showed his veteran status.

TIM ARMSTRONG, Chief of Staff, Department of Military Order of the Purple Heart, testified in support of HB 180. He said he was encouraged by the fact that obtaining the identification was voluntary in nature. He spoke of the advantages of having the designation on a driver's license or identification card, such as recognition of veterans by law enforcement and the ability of family to receive documentation for a burial flag.

[10:30:39 AM](#)

SENATOR KOOKESH asked if the state ID card would be included in the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said that would be covered.

SENATOR KOOKESH questioned the wording "or".

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI said the language could be checked to make sure it gives a person the option of having both forms of ID.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI stated he would hold HB 180 in committee.

10:32:11 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Wielechowski adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee at 10:32 a.m.