

Alaska Legislature

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Sponsor Substitute for House Bill 5 Sponsor Statement

In the spring of 2014, two Alaska State Troopers, Sgt. Scott Johnson and Gabe Rich, were shot and killed in the line of duty after a standoff in Tanana. Their families were subsequently faced with not only the immeasurable loss of a loved one, but also a definite termination of their health care coverage. They are simply one example of the many Alaskan families who face hardship beyond just the sacrifice of a loved one.

The State of Alaska asks their public safety employees to provide for the protection and safety of our communities. It is only right that when our employees give their lives in the service of the state that we continue to serve the family they have left behind.

House Bill 5 provides spouses and children of public safety employees who have been killed in the line of duty with security and coverage by allowing them to continue to be covered by their existing plans. Families would be subject to all policies associated with their individual plans, and would be able to elect additional coverage available to plan members. To pay the premiums associated with families' plans, the Department of Public Safety would establish a fund that would contain sufficient capital to cover costs that arise. Municipalities would be able to opt into the fund, and participate as an employer-contributor, and donations would be able to be received by the fund.

This approach not only provides a level of comfort for families, but also provides clarity in the state's budget. Currently, the Department of Public Safety, through executive direction, covers the cost of health care premiums for the families of fallen employees. This presents a significant and uncertain budgeting hurdle every year, in anticipating and funding the costs of health plans, which would be solved with the passage of House Bill 5.

For families coping with the loss of a loved one, their last concern should be losing medical coverage. House Bill 5 provides security for families and clarity for the state when approaching the line of duty death of a state employee.