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**HB140**  
**SPONSOR STATEMENT**

**TRIAL BY JURY: “INHERENT AND INVALUABLE”**

In the United States, there are two places where every American is supposed to be equal—at the ballot box and in the courtroom. Those are powerful rights that should be championed by every one of us regardless political affiliation because they are the very definition of a free people. Indeed, John Adams wrote, “Representative government and trial by jury are the heart and lungs of liberty. Without them we have no other fortification against being ridden like horses, fleeces like sheep, worked like cattle, and fed and clothed like swine and hounds.”

Thomas Jefferson wrote, “I consider [trial by jury] as the only anchor yet imagined by man, by which a government can be held to the principles of its constitution.” It is a sentiment echoed by former U. S. Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist. “The right to trial by jury in civil cases at common law is fundamental to our history and jurisprudence. A right so fundamental and sacred to the citizens should be jealously guarded.”

For the State of Alaska to impose one of the most egregious punitive measures on a parent, family and child, without the option of a jury trial is a crime in itself. The termination of parental rights is a lifetime punishment. It is a severing of tradition, culture, and heritage. It is, in fact, the destruction of the family.

Before the State of Alaska imposes such a sentence to the guilty and innocent alike – a trial by jury should be a last safeguard to insure that the no prejudice, hearsay, malus or financial gain has factored into a decision to terminate any Alaskans parental rights.