

SPONSOR STATEMENT
HB 225

“An Act relating to medical examiners and medical death examinations.”

Last year alone, there were nearly 1,100 cases filed with the State of Alaska’s medical examiner’s office. All of these cases require responsibilities ranging from autopsies, administrative duties and legal responsibilities, such as testifying in court. With this sizeable caseload for our state, how many medical examiners do we have to handle it? The answer is, one.

Our one state medical examiner has been stretched so thin with this caseload that he has been forced to decide which cases will actually receive autopsies. Currently autopsies are required only when the death was suspicious or if there was a crime involved. When forced to pick and choose, something could be overlooked in these remaining cases that did not receive the attention they should have. We also have to consider what would happen if our one medical examiner became ill or for any reason could not fulfill his duties.

The position of the state medical examiner is a critical function in the state and a tremendous responsibility. It is a responsibility not only to the families and friends to the victim, but also to the community as a whole. The fact that there is such a large caseload for only one medical examiner has become a growing concern for policy makers, law enforcement officials and the community.

Under current state law, the commissioner of health and social services is required to appoint only a medical examiner. HB 225 would require the commissioner of health and social services to appoint both a chief medical examiner and a deputy medical examiner to share the extensive workload.