

Sponsor Statement

CS HB 12 (JUD)am

“An Act relating to the crime of harassment committed by use of electronic communication.”

Under CS [HB 12](#) (JUD)am, the list of methods of harassment under [AS 11.61.120](#) will be expanded to include the sending of obscene electronic communications, or sending electronic communications that threaten physical injury or sexual contact.

The Internet and other telecommunication technologies are advancing every aspect of society. Unfortunately, many of the attributes of this technology - low cost, ease of use, and anonymous nature – make it an attractive medium for a new concern known as electronic communications, or email, harassment. As the online population has soared to an estimated 80 million users, the real-world crime of harassment has moved into cyberspace, causing annoyance and fear for victims.

Law enforcement agencies throughout Alaska have seen a rise in reported electronic harassment crimes. As the Internet becomes a more integral part of personal and professional lives, individuals can take advantage of the ease of communication as well as increased access to personal information and the benefit of anonymity. Whereas an individual may be unwilling or unable to confront a victim in person or on the telephone, he or she may have little hesitation sending harassing or threatening electronic communications to a victim.

The fact that email harassment does not involve physical contact creates the misconception that it is more benign than physical harassment or stalking. However, law enforcement agencies recognize the serious nature and extent of email harassment and are beginning to take aggressive action. In response to the growing number of reported email harassment claims, special units have been developed to investigate and prosecute email harassment and other computer related crimes. CS HB 12 (JUD)am would provide these agencies with a significant tool to protect and prosecute on behalf of Alaskans.