

Alaska State Legislature

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Sponsor Statement

HB 127 – Roadside Memorials

When a person dies on an Alaska road, family and friends often express their grief by placing items near where the tragedy occurred, in a kind of memorial to their loved one. Sometimes, even strangers are moved to add to the memorial when particularly touched by the loss.

These memorials serve two purposes. One, to allow the grieving to express their sorrow, and two, to remind those who travel, of the inherent dangers in driving Alaska's roads, particularly when excessive speed or alcohol contributed to the cause of the accident. Many Alaskans instinctively check their speed and take extra care in driving when passing one of these personal memorials.

Recently, the State of Alaska Department of Transportation informed the creators of such memorials that these encroachments to the right of way would no longer be tolerated. They warned that the department would remove them if they were not taken down by a date certain. This action is in response to a perceived threat to federal highway funding if the state allowed the memorials, as well as an interpretation of the state law that bans billboards.

The liberty to express our grief, the desire to memorialize a fallen officer, the wish to recognize a tragedy among our community, is a very personal freedom that must not be unnecessarily infringed by government.

[HB 127](#) sets out to clarify that, while the State does not attempt to discourage the placing of such memorials, they will be reasonably regulated so as not to allow unsafe distractions and hazards in Alaska's right of ways.