



Alaska State Legislature

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House Bill 62

Sponsor Statement — Version A

“An Act relating to solemnization of marriage.”

At present, during the solemnization of marriage, couples must assent to the marriage in the presence of each other, the person solemnizing the marriage, and at least two additional witnesses. Afterward, all parties must sign the marriage certificates. House Bill 62 would eliminate the requirements of any additional witnesses at the marriage solemnization and the signatures of these witnesses on marriage certificates in an effort to help support Alaska’s destination wedding industry while preserving the integrity of marriage solemnizations.

Alaska is one of 20 states that require two wedding witnesses—the upper limit of wedding witness requirements nationwide. Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia do not require wedding witnesses at all. Wedding witnesses played a more critical role in past centuries when record keeping was less automated. Witnesses could be contacted to verify the wedding had taken place in the event that records were damaged or missing. Today, however, the role of a wedding witness is ceremonial. In Alaska, while the person solemnizing the marriage must meet certain criteria, no form of witness verification (proof of identification, language comprehension, address validation, etc.) is required. HB 62 would allow Alaska to compete with states like Hawaii and Florida, which require no wedding witnesses and lead the nation in destination weddings.

Destination weddings are a growing business in Alaska, especially as couples opt for small, intimate ceremonies rather than large ones due to risks associated with COVID-19. But the requirement of two wedding witnesses makes Alaska a less attractive location for many who travel from farther away or who do not want the financial burden of a larger wedding.

Couples who come to the state without their own witnesses are tasked with finding strangers to witness their wedding. The burden of supplying these witnesses often falls to those who work in Alaska’s wedding industry who ask friends and family to witness the weddings of their out-of-town clients. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is hard for out-of-state couples to find two witnesses and couples may be reluctant to have strangers as their wedding witnesses. The additional witness requirement can also place an increased financial burden on the couple. For example, for a remote location wedding, such as a glacier, the couple must pay extra seating costs to transport the witnesses.

At present, destination weddings bring in an estimated \$1 million in revenue to Alaska in the form of roughly 500 destination weddings a year. This revenue figure doesn’t consider the fact that more than 90% of the out-of-state couples who come to Alaska to get married stay for days and weeks to explore our great state. The resulting benefit to Alaska’s tourism industry is substantial.