

Senator Donny Olson
SPONSOR STATEMENT

SB 217, State Genetic Privacy Laws

We are all familiar on how useful DNA identification has been for law enforcement and paternity disputes. But there is another side to this new technology and that is the special need for a genetic privacy law in Alaska.

On June 26, 2000, The Human Genome Project, a public consortium, and Celera Genomics, a private company, jointly announced the completion of a “working draft of the human genome.” Spelling out the 3 billion “letters” of the human genome—the biochemical messages encoded in our DNA for manufacturing and operating a complete human being.

This is the stepping-stone in deciphering the blueprint that makes us human. Every human cell (hair, blood, fingernail parings, and body tissue) carries a complete set of our genes. Consequently, these genetic profiles will yield information that could be used against us. For example, insurance companies can decide whether to issue life insurance based upon our gene make-up (i.e predisposition to cancer, alcoholism, or other health concerns).

We have state laws to restrict access to medical records; however, the State of Alaska has yet to specify any protection of genetic information. Medical information is presumed confidential, but the increasing capability to store and rapidly transfer data escalates the challenge of protecting privacy.

At the present time, there is no national statute regarding genetic privacy laws. Fifteen states have required informed consent for a third party to perform or require a genetic test or to obtain genetic information. Twenty-three states require informed consent to disclose genetic information.

I have introduced SB 217 to give special consideration of the advancing biotechnology in DNA analysis and to give Alaskans a right of privacy to their genetic information.

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