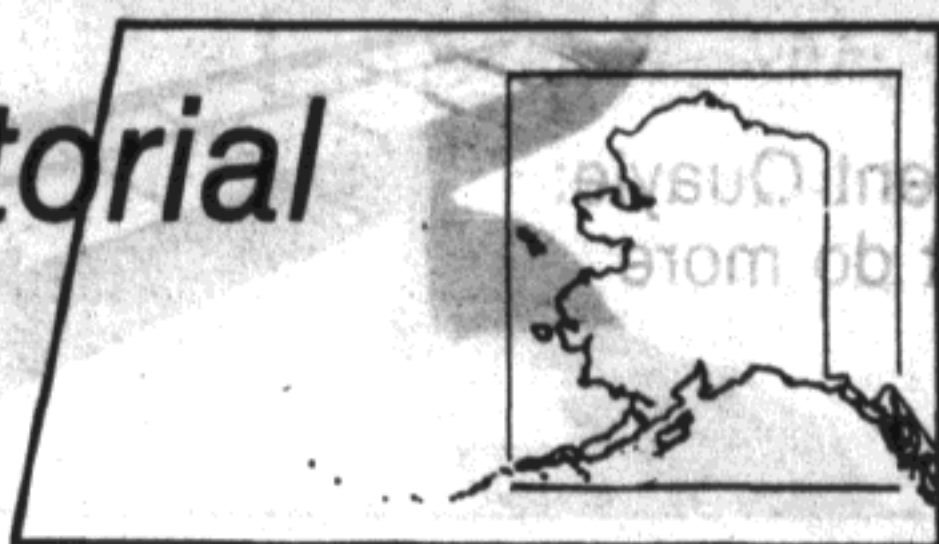


# Editorial



## *Bereaved families need aid*

*Tundra Times* reporter Steve Pilkington has written a very important story this week in his continuing effort to do something about the fact that rural Alaskans whose relatives die are being victimized.

We've discussed this subject a number of times in the past, but we still concerned about finding a way to assist bereaved families.

Because Alaska law requires an autopsy in most deaths not attended by a physician, the bodies of those who die in the Bush often must be sent to Anchorage or Fairbanks.

The problems that arise are that relatives sometimes are unaware of which funeral home is handling the arrangements, they are charged for extra costs they did not authorize and they often face long delays in holding a funeral.

These problems place an incredible burden on rural Alaskans, and we urge legislators to look into their hearts and find a way to help solve them.

Steve reports that the Legislature has shelved the issue for this year, and considering the budget problems the state is facing this may be the only alternative at this time.

On the other hand, we urge the Legislature to continue its probe into this subject.

There is a real need for legislators to be involved, because Steve has uncovered a discrepancy in Alaska laws. It appears that even though it is clearly illegal to hold a body for debts, funeral home owners say another statute authorizes them to ensure a method of payment before releasing the deceased.

This situation must be resolved because it is absolutely unconscionable to put the relatives of people who die in rural Alaska in the impossible situation of not being able to hold a funeral in their home village.

The Attorney General's office states that the intent of Alaska's law was not to authorize the holding of bodies, but to protect people from unexpected costs.

Steve plans to continue to follow this issue, and we will continue to urge legislators to find solutions to these problems. People who are suffering from the tragedy of a death in the family must not face added grief at this most difficult time.

