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Sex Offender Bill Receives Unanimous Bipartisan Support *Sen. Hollis French and Colleagues Take Stand to Protect Women and Children*

JUNEAU – Repeat sex offenders would receive longer sentences under a bill introduced by Senator Hollis French (D-Anchorage). Senate Bill 85 passed out of the Senate State Affairs Committee yesterday with unanimous bipartisan support.

SB 85 aims to increase the penalties for repeat sex offenders. It also would make repeat sex offenders ineligible for the one-third “good time” reduction in prison sentences that most offenders can earn.

“Alaska ranks among the worst in the country in terms of reported rapes per capita, and has for years,” says Senator French. “I believe it is time to change that and to do something about this undistinguished – and shameful – rating. This law will provide additional protection for Alaska’s women and children, who are the most frequent victims of sexual crimes.”

SB 85 focuses on repeat sexual offenders, those who have been convicted of a prior sex offense, whether in Alaska or in the Lower 48, and who subsequently commit another sexual felony here in the Alaska. Research on sexual offenders has shown that they should be dealt with differently than other types of offenders. However, current sentencing law in Alaska treats all two-time felons the same. Prior felony convictions are given equal weight when an individual is sentenced on a new offense.

Take this example: an individual is convicted of sexual assault, and he has one prior felony conviction. The law as it stands treats that first conviction the same, whether it was a vehicle theft or a previous sexual assault.

“This is wrong,” says French, a former state prosecutor.

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(2 of 2)

“The purpose of SB 85 is to establish a separate, and more stringent set of sentencing guidelines for those who commit second or subsequent sexual offenses.”

The other change proposed by SB 85 eliminates the “good time” reduction that many prisoners earn in their sentences for good behavior. The “good time” reduction often reduces a prison term by a third, or more. Repeat sex offenders will be required to serve the full sentence they receive in court.

“Victims are often dismayed to learn that the 10-year sentence imposed by a judge only amounts to a little over six years,” notes French. “This change in the law will cure that.”

The bill passed out of its first committee unanimously, and continues to receive good support. “There’s no political angle to this subject. I appreciate the support of my Republican colleagues in the Senate, including Senators Ben Stevens, Fred Dyson, and Con Bunde, who are co-sponsoring the measure.”

SB 85 is now in the Senate Judiciary Committee, where a hearing has been requested.

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For more information, contact Senator Hollis French, 907-465-3892.

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