



# Alaska State Legislature House and Senate Democrats

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## *Arson Earns Violent Crimes Compensation Status*

### *Bipartisan legislative effort to protect victims of arson heads now to Governor*

JUNEAU – House Bill 350, sponsored in a bi-partisan effort by Representatives Max Gruenberg (D-Anchorage) and Carl Gatto (R-Palmer) adds personal injury and death from arson in the first degree to the injuries compensable by the Violent Crimes Compensation Board.

“Last year, on September 29, while a Russian Jack family slept, their home was torched by an unknown arsonist. Fortunately everyone escaped. Deliberately setting a fire that endangers human life is first-degree arson,” said Representative Gruenberg. “Current Alaska law will not allow first-degree arson victims to receive compensation from the state Violent Crimes Compensation Board if they are injured or killed. HB 350 will correct this.”

In his testimony in the House State Affairs Committee, Gerad Godfrey, chair of the Violent Crimes Compensation Board stated, “The absence of arson from the inception of the bill that created the parameters for this board was likely an oversight.” He added that any personally adverse results from that fire should be compensable by the Violent Crime Compensation Board. He gave credit to both Representatives Gatto and Gruenberg for addressing this long overdue and overlooked provision for victims of arson.

Donna Garner, executive director of Victims for Justice said, “Arson is a serious crime and not at all uncommon in the State of Alaska. Victims of arson can be left with many scars, both physical and mental. The trauma can be devastating as with any serious crime. The financial demands can be overwhelming. Too often these victims are without any support or resources.”

The bill passed both the House of Representatives and the Senate. It now heads to the governor for signature.

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