



Alaska State Legislature House and Senate Democrats

WEB: <http://www.akdemocrats.org>
CONTACT: Peggy Wilcox, finance aide
PHONE: (907) 465-4957
FAX: (907) 465-4419
EMAIL: peggy_wilcox@legis.state.ak.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE • May 7, 2004

First Day FY05 Budget Conference Committee

Crime victims lose; lawyers win

JUNEAU – On the first day of meetings to settle the differences between the House and Senate versions of the state's operating budget, the conference committee drew a clear picture of their vision for direction in the budget. During the early morning meeting Friday, the Department of Law received an extra \$1.4 million for eleven new attorneys, and the Violent Crimes Compensation Board and Victims for Justice were denied a combined \$277,000.

Over objections by Representative Eric Croft (D-Anchorage) and Senator Lyman Hoffman (D-Bethel), the two lone Democratic legislators on the six-member committee, the conference committee chose to accept the Senate's recommendation for new attorney hires for the Attorney General's office.

The comparison of spending priorities was highlighted through the objections of the minority members on the committee. Representative Croft noted the discrepancy through objections to motions as the committee declined to accept the higher amounts in the budget for the services to victims of crimes.

Asked later, Croft said, "It is an odd choice by this legislature to increase funding for attorneys while at the same time decreasing funding for services to victims of the crimes being prosecuted. Less than one-fifth of the amount granted in increases to the Department of Law would have fully funded the requests of these two vital victims services agencies."

Victims for Justice (VFJ) provides services to victims such as crisis intervention, grief counseling, and court accompaniment, they help co-victims and victims cope with trauma and grief, and ensure that rights of victims are not ignored within the judicial system. The 2003 budget gave VFJ \$246,000. The Governor and House reduced this number by \$125,000. VFJ requested, and received in the Senate version of the budget, enough funds to get them back to their 2003 budget level. This morning the conference committee voted to adopt the lower House numbers. Cutting this money in half will have dramatic effects on their services.

The Violent Crime Compensation Board provides financial relief to the innocent victims of violent crime. Last year the Violent Crime Compensation Board received \$1,587,100. This year, the House budget funded them at this level, but the Senate reduced their funding by \$152,400. The conference committee today adopted the Senate's lower numbers. In presentations to the Legislature earlier this year, the VCCB stated they would need to prorate compensation to victims if they are not funded at the House level of funding. For example, even at last year's funding level a rape victim would be compensated at approximately 80 percent.

###

Putting Alaskans First • Moving Alaska Forward 2004

Sen. Bettye Davis, Sen. Johnny Ellis, Sen. Kim Elton, Sen. Lyman Hoffman, Sen. Hollis French, Sen. Gretchen Guess, Sen. Georgianna Lincoln, Sen. Donny Olson, Rep. Ethan Berkowitz, Rep. Sharon Cissna, Rep. Harry Crawford, Rep. Eric Croft, Rep. Les Gara, Rep. Max Gruenberg, Rep. David Guttenberg, Rep. Reggie Joule, Rep. Mary Kapsner, Rep. Beth Kerttula, Rep. Albert Kookesh, Rep. Carl Moses