

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Material Witness Bills Added to Special Session *Legislation Will Combat Gun Violence and Gangs in Anchorage*

(JUNEAU) – A key piece of legislation to help law enforcement and prosecutors stem the growing tide of senseless shootings and gang violence has been added to the call of the current special session in Juneau by Gov. Frank Murkowski.

Sen. Con Bunde (R- Anchorage) and Rep. Lesil McGuire (R – Anchorage) will both work on witness detention bills in the House and Senate this week.

Both deal with the handling of material witnesses who refuse to cooperate with police investigating a felony criminal case. The bills allow a peace officer to temporarily detain and photograph an individual who witnessed a crime, like homicide or manslaughter, but refuses to cooperate.

Witnesses will also face tougher penalties if they refuse to answer questions or fail to appear before a grand jury.

Sen. Bunde sponsored the witness detention bill (SB 206) during the regular session. It passed both chambers but didn't make it to the governor's desk after time ran out for a concurrence vote in the senate.

Sen. Bunde says the bill strikes the proper balance. "This legislation means law enforcement and prosecutors will have a tool requiring witnesses to cooperate without trampling on an individual's rights."

Rep. McGuire chairs the House Judiciary Committee and will work on the bill in her committee during the special session. "Gang violence is a growing problem threatening the safety of our communities. This bill will give law enforcement additional tools to get the information that they need to solve these crimes."

The second special session is scheduled to end August 10th.

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