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REPRESENTATIVE JOHN COGHILL

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House Passes Legislation to Protect Alaska's Families

(JUNEAU) – The Alaska House of Representatives has passed legislation to protect Alaska's families. House Bill 53, an omnibus bill compiling pieces of legislation related to family rights, passed the House unanimously.

Sponsored by Representative John Coghill (R-North Pole), HB 53 is co-sponsored by two other Fairbanks legislators, Representatives Mike Kelly (R-Fairbanks) and Jay Ramras (R-Fairbanks), as well as, two Anchorage legislators, Representatives Lesil McGuire (R-Anchorage) and Norman Rokeberg (R-Anchorage). The bill also includes voluntary relinquishment provisions and opening court proceedings proposed by Governor Murkowski.

Representative McGuire praised this legislation as it passed the House floor. "This bill leaves one of the strongest legacies of this legislature by putting the families, their rights and responsibilities first and striking the appropriate balance between protecting Alaska's children, respecting the rule of law and affording families the opportunity for continued relationships wherever possible," she said.

HB 53 would make the child-in-need-of-aid process transparent by making confidential information currently unavailable accessible to certain people and making court proceedings open to the public. The legislation would also strengthen the rights of grandparents in Alaska, especially if they have been instrumental in the raising of a child or children. This bill would give grandparents, relatives or family friends consideration for placement of a child if parental rights are terminated.

"Preserving and protecting Alaska's families has always been one of my priorities. I believe that this bill does just that," said Representative Coghill.

HB 53 now moves to the Senate where Senator Fred Dyson (R-Eagle River) will carry the bill. "The House has done excellent work on this bill. I think it was genius to combine 3-4 bills on the subject of protecting children."

HB 53 is scheduled for the Senate Health, Education and Social Services Committee later this week.

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