

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **AUSTERMAN PROMOTES VPSO PROGRAM**

#### **Legislation increases benefits and provides for village parole and probation**

(JUNEAU)—After working for the last three weeks with Senator Halford and the Department of Public Safety, Senator Alan Austerman (R-Kodiak/Southeast Islands) has joined on to legislation introduced by Senate President Rick Halford on March 15<sup>th</sup>. The legislation would increase benefits for Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs), and increase probation services in rural Alaska.

“VPSO’s are the front line of public protection in our smallest communities,” said Austerman. “VPSOs are dedicated to their state, their jobs, and their community. Senate Bill 145 recognizes the importance of VPSOs to rural Alaska by providing advancement opportunities by adding probation/parole supervision as part of the VPSO program, and the ability to participate in the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS).”

Most VPSOs do not currently have any retirement benefits. Providing retirement benefits will not only be beneficial to the VPSOs individually, but will provide an inducement to remain in the program, and in turn help reduce turnover and subsequent training costs.

“It will also provide more continuity and stability in communities,” Austerman said.

SB 145 would also expand the VPSO program to provide supervision services for individuals on probation or parole. Communities in rural Alaska recently participated in a supervision pilot program based in Dillingham. The acknowledgement by the Department of Corrections and Public Safety that the pilot program was a success made it clear that home-community supervision should be implemented in villages statewide.

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