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## Senator Rick Halford District M

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### **Halford Bills Enforce Victims' Rights, Expand DNA Registry**

(JUNEAU) – Sen. Rick Halford (R-Chugiak) introduced two bills on Tuesday that will increase the chance of finding violent criminals through DNA registries, and ensure that victims of crime are informed and able to assert the rights guaranteed to them in Alaska's Constitution.

Senate Bill 99 would expand the state's convicted offender DNA registry to include samples from those convicted of burglary. DNA samples are now taken only from those convicted of a violent felony offense. Law enforcement officers search the registry when they have DNA evidence from violent crimes, but no clear suspect. Twenty-four states have expanded their registry to include burglary. Since many burglars go on to commit violent offenses, studies have shown that expanding the DNA registry would significantly increase the state's chances of catching violent criminals.

Senate Bill 105 would create an Office of Victims' Rights and a Victims' Advocate, designed to help guide crime victims through the legal process in the aftermath of a violent crime. The office would keep victims informed of their rights, could testify on their behalf in court, and could investigate cases where victims feel their rights have been denied.

“In 1994 voters approved an amendment to Alaska's Constitution that guarantees victims' rights, but simply passing an amendment is not enough,” said Halford. “It is difficult for the victim of a violent crime to wade through our judicial system, which is full of technicalities and legal jargon. Many feel victimized twice – first by the criminal, then by the system. This office would ensure that victims' rights are protected.”

Funding for the office would come from Permanent Fund Dividends forfeited by repeat criminals. The bill lowers the forfeiture requirement for misdemeanor offenders from three crimes to two, if one of the prior crimes is a felony. This would generate approximately half a million dollars each year in additional general fund revenue, more than enough to run the Office of Victim's Rights, said Halford.

SB 105 is similar to Halford's Office of Victims' Rights bill that unanimously passed the 21<sup>st</sup> Legislature, only to be vetoed by Governor Tony Knowles.

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