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Senate President Rick Halford

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Alaska Senate Supports VPSOs

(JUNEAU) – The Alaska Senate passed legislation today increasing Village Public Safety Officers’ benefits and responsibilities.

“Enhancing the role of VPSOs will strengthen the delivery of law enforcement where the need is greatest – in the most remote and inaccessible regions of our state,” said Sen. Rick Halford (R-Chugiak), sponsor of the bill. “Increasing the responsibilities, advancement opportunities, pay and benefits of these positions will provide inducements for people to remain in the program, reducing turnover and subsequent new-hire training costs.”

Communities in rural Alaska recently participated in a supervision pilot program based in Dillingham as a result of an initiative sponsored by Halford in 1999 and 2000. This program allowed local supervision of parolees and individuals on probation in their home communities. The Departments of Corrections and Public Safety recognized the pilot program’s success, making it clear that home-community supervision should be implemented in villages statewide. Senate Bill 145 extends this opportunity to all VPSO positions.

“An offender has a much greater chance of successfully completing their probation if they are able to return to their home village and the support network of their family and community,” said Halford. “If they have to stay in a regional center for probation then the availability of drugs and alcohol and the lack of family support make successful completion much less likely.”

In addition to new probation responsibilities, retirement benefits and increased pay, SB 145 upgrades the VPSO program statewide by providing a career path officers. The bill creates new supervisory positions, Regional Public Safety Officers, allowing VPSOs who stay in the program an opportunity to advance to a position with greater responsibilities.

The legislation has strong bi-partisan support in the Senate. Fifteen members of the body have joined Halford as co-sponsors of the legislation, including Sen. Jerry Ward (R-Kenai), Sen. Georgianna Lincoln (D-Rampart), Sen. Lyman Hoffman (D-Bethel), Sen. Donny Olson (D-Nome) and Sen. Johnny Ellis (D-Anchorage).

SB 145 passed the Senate with a vote of 18-1, and now goes to the House for consideration.

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Excerpts from Sen. Ward’s floor comments in support of SB 145 are available on the Majority Actuality Line, 800-478-6540.