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Legislature Passes Bill to Expand DNA Registry

(JUNEAU) – Law enforcement officers will have a better chance of finding violent criminals through DNA registries under legislation passed by the Alaska House on Sunday.

Senate Bill 99, sponsored by Sen. Rick Halford (R-Chugiak) includes convicted burglars' DNA samples in the state's convicted offender DNA registry to include samples from those convicted of burglary. DNA samples are now taken only from individuals convicted of a violent felony offense.

Law enforcement officers use the registry to match offenders with DNA evidence from violent crime scenes. Twenty-five states and the federal government 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.

"Taking samples from convicted burglars is not an invasion of their private health history, and does not make their DNA public record," said Halford. "Any loss of privacy these individuals face is significantly lower than the invasion of privacy and personal space that their victims experienced."

"State and federal statutes clearly state that our DNA identification system is to be used for law enforcement purposes only," said Halford. "The tests we conduct on these samples give law enforcement a DNA 'fingerprint,' which is then entered into the national DNA database. The database does not contain any information about a person's race, gender, hereditary traits or even their name. If another law enforcement agency in the country gets a match, they must contact Alaska to find out who the person is."

SB 99 passed the House with a vote of 31 – 5, and now goes to the governor for signature.

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