

ALASKA SENATE

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Senator Pete Kelly

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Kelly Bill Extends Program for Mentally Ill

(JUNEAU) – Sen. Pete Kelly introduced legislation today to extend a program that provides treatment for mentally ill Alaskans.

The Designated Evaluation and Treatment Program was created in the Spring of 1999 to provide treatment through local hospitals for people who are in mental crisis and have nowhere else to go. These individuals are working poor people who have no insurance or Medicaid coverage, who cannot afford hospitalization and who meet certain eligibility requirements.

The Division of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities has designated eight local community hospitals as evaluation facilities providing 72-hour psychiatric evaluations, and two as treatment facilities providing up to 30 days of treatment. The division pays for care provided by the hospitals on a payor of last resort basis. Up to 250 receive hospital services reimbursed through this program each year.

“This assistance has been available since 1978, but the eligibility criteria were vague and open to individual interpretation,” said Sen. Pete Kelly (R-Fairbanks). “That’s why I sponsored Senate Bill 97 two years ago, to clarify the criteria and create the program as it exists today. But the bill includes a sunset clause that will end the program on July 1, 2001 and return it to the state it was in before.”

Senate Bill 154, also sponsored by Kelly, would remove the sunset clause and extend the program indefinitely. Without this change, individuals in need of treatment would have to be transported to Alaska Psychiatric Institute or held in correctional facilities.

“It is important that those who are in acute mental crisis receive help as quickly as possible, without having to spend time in a jail or leave the support of their home community to go to Anchorage,” said Kelly. “This program has proven to be beneficial for the people who need it most. It would be a tragedy for these patients and their families if the program were to end.”

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