

ALASKA SENATE

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Senator Pete Kelly

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Senate Extends Program for Mentally Ill

(JUNEAU) – The Alaska Senate passed a bill today extending a program that provides treatment for mentally ill Alaskans.

“Our state has provided assistance for more than 20 years to people who are in mental crisis but don’t have the resources to get treatment, but the criteria for receiving this aid was vague and open to individual interpretation,” said Sen. Pete Kelly (R-Fairbanks). “In 1999 I sponsored legislation to create the Designated Evaluation and Treatment Program to make it easier for people to receive help, and this has been a successful and effective program.”

Senate Bill 154, sponsored by Kelly, removes the programs termination date and extends it indefinitely. Allowing the DET program to remain in place will provided continued care for working poor people who have no insurance or Medicaid coverage, who cannot afford hospitalization and who meet certain eligibility requirements. It will also prevent individuals in need of treatment from being transported to Alaska Psychiatric Institute or held in correctional facilities.

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

SB 154 moves to the House for consideration.

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