

ALASKA SENATE

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Senator Pete Kelly

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Legislature Extends Program for Mentally Ill

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

The Designated Evaluation and Treatment Program was created in 1999 to make it easier for people who are in mental crisis but do not have the resources to get the help they need. The assistance has been available for more than 20 years, but the criteria for receiving the aid was vague and open to individual interpretation.

“The DET program has proven both successful and effective in helping people who do not have insurance or Medicaid coverage, and who are in acute need of mental help,” said Sen. Pete Kelly (R-Fairbanks), sponsor of Senate Bill 154. “When we put the program together we gave it a limited life, but now we know it works, it is appropriate to remove the ending date and allow the program to continue indefinitely.”

SB 154 allows the DET program to remain in place, providing continued care for working poor who have no insurance or Medicaid coverage, who cannot afford hospitalization and who meet certain eligibility requirements. It also prevents individuals in need of treatment from being transported to Alaska Psychiatric Institute or held in correctional facilities. For example, in Fairbanks the number of patients sent to Anchorage for treatment was reduced from 70 in 1999 to only 5 in 2000.

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 people 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 the Alaska Psychiatric Institute in Anchorage,” said Kelly. “It would be a tragedy for these patients and their families if the program were to end.”

SB 154 goes to the governor for signature. He is expected to sign it into law.

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