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Senate Requires Expedited Hearings for Juviles in Adult Lock-Up Facilities

(JUNEAU) – The Alaska Senate passed a bill today that conforms state statutes to federal guidelines setting conditions for the detention of youthful offenders following arrest.

“Youths taken into custody in remote communities are often held in adult facilities while waiting for transportation to one of Alaska’s six youth detention centers,” said Sen. Gene Therriault (R-North Pole), sponsor of Senate Bill 178. “Federal regulations require juveniles to be held in adult jails or lockups for no more than 24 hours, but as we all know, travel around our state can be unavoidably delayed for days at a time.”

The federal regulations allow exemptions to the 24-hour time limit when transfer is impossible due to adverse weather, limited transportation options or other conditions, but only if the juvenile receives a court hearing within 24 hours of arrest. By changing state law to make sure juveniles get a court appearance within 24 hours of being placed in an adult correctional facility, SB 178 lets the state take advantage of the time-limit exemptions.

“Because we are not always able to follow the requirement that these juveniles be moved to youth facilities within 24 hours, the state jeopardizes funding for youth courts, mentoring programs and other grant funded support programs,” said Therriault. “This single change to the statutes will allow us to continue these alternative programs, while ensuring that juveniles are held in adult facilities no longer than absolutely necessary.”

SB 178 moves to the House for consideration.

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