

Sponsor Statement for CSHB 132 (JUD)

Liquor License Applicant Check/Training

An Act relating to the possession or distribution of alcohol in a local option area; requiring liquor license applicants to submit fingerprints for the purpose of conducting a criminal history background check, and relating to the use of criminal justice information by the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board; providing for a review of alcohol server education courses by the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board every two years; and providing for an effective date.

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The House Judiciary Committee has been requested to introduced this bill to address some problems in the area of bootlegging alcohol, and the issuance of liquor licenses to persons with criminal records outside the state of Alaska. Bootlegging is a prevalent problem in “dry” areas, and is a large contributor to crime in those areas. In addition, by requiring applicants for liquor licenses to give their fingerprints, we can thoroughly investigate the criminal backgrounds of these individuals so that only responsible individuals may obtain a liquor license.

Bootlegging

The Alaska Criminal Justice Assessment Commission has found that in rural and Bush communities, the amount of violent crime is directly proportional to the amount of alcohol consumed by the residents. The majority of villages in four rural regions (those surrounding Bethel, Nome, Kotzebue, and Point Barrow) have responded by prohibiting the sale and importation of alcohol, but the hub communities in these four regions remain either “damp” or “wet.”

This bill creates measures designed to restrict the availability of illegally-imported alcohol in the dry areas of Alaska to help reduce violent crime in those areas. Specifically, it reduces the amount of distilled spirits that lead to a presumption that the person possessed the alcoholic beverages for purposes of sale. It also defines “bring,” “send” and “transport” to include attempts or solicitations to import alcohol illegally into the local option communities. By including attempt and solicitation in the definition of these acts, the State is able to prosecute these actions on the same level as if they had completed the crime. This will subject the defendants to higher levels of penalties.

Fingerprinting

This portion of the bill has been created in cooperation with, and at the request of, the Alcohol Beverage Control Board (ABC Board). This bill allows the ABC Board, through the Department of Public Safety, to submit fingerprint cards of prospective liquor licensees to the FBI’s national

criminal history record check. An agency needs specific legislative authorization for the use of the national database for licensing purposes.

Currently, a criminal record check will only produce convictions from Alaska. By chance, the ABC Board has discovered prior to issuing licenses, serious criminal convictions of an applicant that was convicted in another state. It is possible that liquor licenses have been issued to others that have serious criminal records, but due to the present system their convictions could not be brought to the attention of the ABC Board.

Members of our society are increasingly mobile making national background checks more necessary. Many of the licensees are not residents of Alaska and some are multi-national corporations. Prevention of future problems, by requiring a national background check for liquor licensees, is sound public protection policy.

The Committee urges your support of this bill.