



## Alaska State Legislature Senate Majority News

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### **Seekins offers bill to help fund legal services** *SB 388 would aid low income Alaskans*

(JUNEAU)—Low income Alaskans could have greater access to legal services under a bill introduced Thursday by Sen. Ralph Seekins (R-Fairbanks) through the Senate Judiciary Committee, which he chairs.

“We know the civil legal needs of low income people in Alaska aren’t being met due to inadequate funding of the organizations that provide those services,” Seekins said. “This is a way that we can use punitive damages for egregious offenses to provide those services for folks who otherwise couldn’t afford the necessary legal services to carry their case forward.”

[Senate Bill 388](#) establishes a civil legal services fund into which the Legislature can appropriate the state’s share of punitive damages awards. State statute provides that 50 percent of punitive damages in tort cases go to the general fund. Under Seekins’ bill, that money could be placed in the civil legal services fund, which could then be appropriated to organizations that provide civil legal services for low income Alaskans, defined as an individual earning less than federal poverty guidelines.

“We’re not creating a drain on anything except those awards that come to the state under punitive damages awards,” Seekins said. “Instead of putting those awards toward the general fund, we are putting it toward a good purpose of funding legal services.”

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