



# Senate Majority News

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## **Senate Hears Bill To Restructure Hearing Process**

(Juneau) The Senate continues work this week on legislation to achieve a more efficient, timely, and fair administrative hearing process.

At 12 p.m. Tuesday in the Conference Room of the Terry Miller Building, the Alaska Association of Administrative Law Judges will hold a panel discussion on Senate Bill 203, introduced by Senate President Gene Therriault (R-North Pole). The bill received its first hearing of the session last week in the Senate Judiciary Committee, where it is scheduled for a hearing again Friday.

Tuesday's panel discussion will include representatives from states around the country that have successfully implemented central administrative hearing panels.

SB 203 is intended to separate the administrative hearing process from the agencies that write and enforce administrative law by creating a model central independent hearing office and instituting new protections and rules for hearing officers.

"In the current system the agency staff not only write the regulations, they also act as both judge and jury to enforce them," Therriault said.

In an effort to accommodate agencies and employees involved in the reorganization, the bill takes an incremental approach. While the central office will eventually incorporate more hearing functions and officers, in the interim it will provide resources, training and alternative dispute resolution for all state hearing officers.

"Simply put, our administrative hearing system can be an unfair, cumbersome and expensive system for citizens to navigate," Therriault said, adding that the legislation builds on efforts begun five years ago by then Rep. Scott Ogan (R-Mat-Su/Chugiak).

SB 203 was introduced late in the 2003 session and moved out of the Senate State Affairs Committee last May.

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