

SPONSOR STATEMENT
SENATE BILL 154

"An Act relating to the jurisdiction for proceedings relating to delinquent minors and to telephonic and televised participation in those proceedings; amending Rules 2, 3, 4, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23, 24.1, and 25, Alaska Delinquency Rules; and providing for an effective date."

Senate Bill 154 addresses two concerns of juvenile justice in Alaska: first, improving the state's ability to hold juvenile offenders accountable for their conduct; and second, increasing the efficiency of the juvenile justice system by allowing telephonic hearings where personal appearance is not necessary for the fair determination of an issue.

Senate Bill 154 fills a serious gap in Alaska's statutes that allows young offenders to avoid prosecution if their role in a crime is not discovered until after the offender becomes 18 years of age, or if charges are not filed before the offender turns 18.

- Currently, when a person under 18 commits a delinquent act, the juvenile justice system is responsible for the matter; when a person over 18 commits a crime, the adult criminal system is responsible for prosecution;
- Recent court decisions have highlighted a loophole in the law: that is where a youth commits a delinquent act while under 18 years of age, but is not discovered or proceedings aren't filed until the person reaches 18. Neither the adult or juvenile system has clear jurisdiction.
- This gap is illustrated by a recent case that arose in Kenai: The State filed a Petition for Adjudication of Delinquency on a 19-year-old who was alleged to have committed a sexual assault when he was 17 years old. The Superior Court dismissed the petition, holding "there is nothing in the statutes that suggests the legislature contemplated adjudication trials for adults who committed crimes as juveniles."
- Senate Bill 154 will fill this gap in jurisdiction by holding the juvenile accountable. The key change is found in proposed AS 47.12.020(b); it provides that the delinquent minor statutes (AS 47.12) apply to a person who commits a violation of the criminal law of the state or a municipality while under 18 years of age, if the period of limitation under AS 12.10 has not expired.

Senate Bill 154 also amends Alaska's Delinquency Rules to allow for telephonic participation by juvenile offenders in certain proceedings. The law would still require a juvenile offender to be present for all hearings where personal presence is necessary for a fair determination of the issue. However, it would avoid expensive travel, where juveniles are transported to court appearances such as status hearings, when telephonic or televised appearance is adequate for the matter to be fairly decided.