



Senator Dennis Egan

Senate Bill 257

Youth Court Funding

Youth Courts are one of Alaska's most effective crime prevention programs. For more than 20 years, youth courts have boasted an eight percent recidivism rate – dramatically lower than the traditional juvenile justice system. Youth courts save our state money, and deliver on the constitution's promise of a trial by one's peers. SB 257 provides a stable source of state investment.

Alaska has one of the strongest Youth Court statutes in the United States. It allows nonprofit and municipal youth courts to handle cases in which youths are accused of misdemeanors, violations, and alcohol crimes. A minor accused of breaking the law is tried, represented, and adjudicated by the minor's peers, with assistance and oversight from volunteer attorneys.

A comprehensive mix of state support, municipal grants, private sector funds, volunteers and federal money keep Alaska's youth courts functioning. SB 257 designates a source for state dollars to go to youth courts: criminal fines. Today, criminal fines are spent on the general administration of state government. SB 257 would require government to account separately for these fines, and allow the legislature to appropriate up to 25 percent of the funds to support youth courts.

Alaska's 12 youth courts operate in communities from Ketchikan to Nome. Alaska's youth courts are tailored to their local communities. Some only sentence youths who have admitted guilt. Others take cases from shortly after arrest through jury trials. But all Alaska Youth Courts relieve a tremendous burden from the traditional juvenile justice system. By providing significant attention to even the smallest infractions, young offenders are held accountable in a meaningful way. By diverting minor offenses, youth courts free highly trained youth corrections staff at the Department of Health & Social Services to focus valuable time and energy on turning around the hard cases.

Youth courts provide a valuable service to Alaskan and are a wise investment. Using criminal fines to pay for crime prevention makes sense.