

March 8, 2009

Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for House Bill 52

Members of the Legislature,

First, I would like to thank the legislature for considering House Bill 52, which will grant some form of counseling for Jurors in a criminal trial. My reason for requesting and supporting this legislation is because of my experiences as a juror on a murder trial. I know I am not the only one who feels this way. Details of the trial are still painful to recall, but if my remembering can help even one future juror begin healing far earlier than I did through this early counseling/intervention, then that may bring me another measure of peace; to know something good can come from something so completely gruesome.

I have lived in Alaska for over 15 years. It is a place of peace and great beauty. However three years ago I answered a jury summons and, suddenly, for two weeks, my mind was saturated with facts no person should have to carry around. It was like watching a horror movie for seven hours (or so) a day and not being allowed out of the theatre except to sleep and get ready for the next day's movie.

I learned in great detail how two men plotted to torture an innocent woman to death. A woman, who served her community, loved her family and had no idea what awaited her. I sat in the same room with the murderers and experienced and watched a level of emotion in that court room that was intense and overwhelming. It was slow torture for me. Every night I cried at home and felt so alone because I had taken an oath as a juror and could not share any details of the horrors I was hearing even with my closest friend and confidant, my husband. For two weeks I took it in. Each night was a challenge to sleep and each morning a test in determination to stay strong and walk into the court room.

What did I learn from my court experience? That there are many ways to break into a house; that breaking a person's neck is not as simple as they make it on television; that you can never be sure what another person's distorted view of you could be; that someone could be lying in wait for you to come home alone so as to abduct you and burn you alive.

I also learned you cannot imagine the challenges you will face as a juror on a criminal trial. That even though what you hear in court did not happen to you, knowing that it did happen to someone, seeing the parties involved and having them see you are more intense than you can expect. That getting over it and moving on is not as simple in practice as it is in theory for a juror.

When the trial was over I approached our Judge, for whom I have great respect as she was the only saving grace of this awful experience. I asked if there was any form of counseling or other resources available to help in transitioning out of this trial. She stated the court system does not provide for counseling or any other kind of support following a criminal trial.

I asked her with tears in my eyes, how am I supposed to get all this out of my head? I feel like I have lived this event and I don't know what to do with it. I wanted my peaceful life back; I want to be able to feel the peace I had before the trial. She apologized and said there was nothing she can offer.

I believe if there had been some form of counseling available to provide jurors tools for processing and releasing the intense and graphic details of a criminal trial, then healing could have started a lot earlier for me and the people I served with. I tried to repress the experience. It wasn't until over a year later when the anxiety and stress became too overwhelming that I finally turned to counseling and was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder. Today, I am pleased to report, I have found better tools to help me move on and the beauty of Alaska has returned to my life.

As jurors we live through the details of these violent and disturbing trials essentially in silence. Trying very hard to rationalize and process what we're seeing and hearing. This has an impact... an impact on people such as what I am still dealing with today. I believe passing this bill is a very important step in supporting the jurors of violent trials and helping them find a path back to peace. I urge you to support House Bill 52 and the constituents who have or will serve on jury duty.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration.

Very Sincerely,

Mindy Lobaugh
1013 Bonnie Dook Dr.
Juneau, Alaska 99801

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

VIOLENT CRIMES COMPENSATION BOARD

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February 22, 2010

Representative Beth Kerttula
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

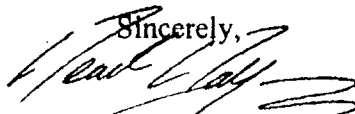
Dear Representative Beth Kerttula:

Thank you for considering HB 52, "An Act authorizing psychological counseling for jurors serving in criminal trials who are traumatized by graphic evidence or testimony." We understand that certain criminal trials can generate serious levels of stress among jurors that can last weeks or months after the trial is over. Traditionally, jurors in a critical trial end their service without ascertaining whether or not the events of that trial have had any psychological impact. For years, there have been cases of post-trial jurors experiencing their own mental pain and difficulty focusing back on their daily lives. Symptoms of juror stress manifest themselves as a number of physical and psychological reactions, including increased anxiety and frustration, disrupted eating and sleeping routines, nausea, depression, and anger and hostility. In many instances, talking to jurors about their symptoms validates their feelings and helps them understand that what they are experiencing is normal and can in itself bring considerable stress relief.

After exposure to a highly graphic criminal case jurors can develop stress by having to relive the traumatic experiences of the victim. For some, it is difficult to suddenly step back into their own world without some form of closure. We believe this is a unique opportunity for courts to have a positive interaction with individuals from the communities they serve. A juror who is asked to fulfill their civic duty should be protected from the potentially negative health effects of the trial process.

In general, post-trial group counseling could reduce stress and offer information on mental health services for those who might need it, provide closure, promote confidence in the judicial system, and enhance satisfaction. We support HB 52 because it would offer traumatized jurors access to group counseling services to help counteract the negative effects which may result from jury service.

Sincerely,



Gerard Goehry
Chairman

February 19, 2010

Representative Beth Kerttula
State Capital
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Kerttula:

I'm writing to extend my utmost support for your legislation – HB 52 - "An Act authorizing psychological counseling for jurors serving in criminal trials who are traumatized by graphic evidence or testimony."

As a juror on the 2003 Joshua Wade trial in Anchorage, I can attest to the need for counseling after a trial involving a heinous crime against an individual. Unlike prime time TV where crimes are committed, investigated and solved in 60 minutes, real life murder trials are gruesome, disturbing and in our case, debated in a court room over the course of nearly four months. Blood spatter patterns, rape, death by repeated blows to the head with a rock, torture, dehumanization – I would argue that these may be things judges, prosecutors, police officers, forensic specialists are trained and equipped to psychologically handle, but the average citizen called to jury duty is not.

At the conclusion of our trial, we were given specific instruction on how to process the evidence, on how to deliberate, on how to come to deliver a verdict according to the instruction presented by the court. We were not however, given any instruction on how we might move past the sound of the victim's mother wailing in the courtroom; of the pictures that we were shown day after day of a woman's raped and beaten body; of the testimony from expert witnesses stating that for blood to have traveled "x" feet from a body, it would have had to have been beaten with "y" severity.

Fortunately, I have a friend and colleague who does trauma counseling. At the conclusion of the Wade trial, this individual did one group counseling session (gratis) for all of us; she then saw me (again, gratis) for several other sessions so that I could further process, and move beyond the prior 4 months. Not all jurors will be as fortunate to have access to free services.

Thank you for your leadership in recognizing and addressing the needs of ordinary citizens who find themselves on an extraordinary jury. While it is our duty to serve, I believe that it is also the duty of the court to provide a means of support at the conclusion of a particularly heinous trial.

With thanks,


Anne M. Gore

Anne M. Gore * 9400 Main Tree Drive * Anchorage AK 99507

Robert H. Edwardson
3842 Killewich Drive
Juneau, AK 99801
March 1, 2009

The Honorable Beth Kerttula
House of Representatives
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Dear Representative Kerttula:

Thank you for sponsoring *HB 52, "An Act authorizing psychological counseling for jurors serving in criminal trials who are traumatized by graphic evidence or testimony."* Throughout my years of as an emergency responder and law enforcement professional, I have witnessed responder trauma caused by reactions to critical incidents. It is appropriate that jurors, as an important component of the law enforcement and judicial systems, become entitled to the same assistance enjoyed by other members of our law enforcement team.

Proper counseling prepares people for their normal reactions to abnormal events. It also provides tools to adapt to those reactions. Loss of sleep, reliving events and disruption of normal routines are just some of the examples of normal reactions to critical incidents that people may not intuitively understand. They may attribute their seemingly abnormal reactions weakness in their own character, or by misattributing their changed behavior to concurrent, yet unrelated events in their lives. Their normal coping skills may be ill prepared to help them, and may actually cause them to turn use mal-adaptive coping mechanisms such as self-medication, or withdrawal from their emotional support networks when they most need them. I can attest that some responders suffer negative life-altering changes by ignoring proper counseling.

Ultimately, the public benefit of providing counseling is the facilitation of jurors' orderly return to daily life, prepared to appropriately respond to their experience. And although they may remain forever changed by vicarious trauma, they will have the skill to properly deal with their reactions. Thank you for your efforts, you have my support.

Sincerely,

Robert (Rob) Edwardson,
CWO2, USCG (Ret)
CISM Basic, Peer and Advanced
Lifelong Alaska Resident

February 24, 2010

Representative Beth Kerttula
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Kerttula:

I believe this is an important bill. As a social worker, I often work through very emotionally difficult situations and problems with clients. This can lead to professional grief, a topic social workers are familiar with and so often form support networks to help them process the challenges of the profession. There are times when I have been very shaken and traumatized by the work I do and I lean on the supports I have developed. However, jurors might not even be aware of the concept of professional grief and likely won't have the networks they need to process what they have been through. I think professional grief can be due to cumulative stress or one particularly stressful event. I think that not only should the counseling be offered, but that jurors participating in traumatic cases should also be advised that counseling should be considered, even if they don't think they will need it.

Professional grief can bring about responses that might not seem to be associated with the cause of the grief. In addition, professional grief often takes the form of hidden grief and is internalized and unexpressed. Individuals experiencing it might feel irritable, angry, anxious, helpless, or guilty without relating it to the experience. Jurors should be made aware of the possibility of professional grief and the importance of working through it.

Please let me know if you have any other questions. Thank you and good luck!

Jeannette Lacey Dunn, MSW

Hannah McCarty

From: Lina LePage [mishi@alaska.net]
Sent: Thursday, February 25, 2010 7:33 PM
To: Hannah McCarty
Subject: [Fwd: Fw: HB 52]
Attachments: untitled-[1.2]; HB 52 Juror Counseling Bill.pdf; 10-02-04 Sponsor Statement HB 52.docx

Hi Hannah,

I just now read this message from my friend Jeanette as I was out of town.

Hopefully it is not too late for input/feedback. I am a mental health clinician (MSW), and I also once participated in a murder trial as a juror three years ago.

I thought at the time that post-trial psychological counseling for jurors was a necessity, and I am very pleased to find out that Rep. Kerttula has introduced a bill to that effect.

I witnessed and experienced great distress from vicarious traumatization as a result of being exposed to graphic images and verbal renditions of the gruesome details involved in a very violent death. In addition, all of us jurors experienced a lot of pressure and stress from the many days of deliberation and from the civil responsibility of deciding of a man's fate. Many jurors were shaken and in tears when all of this was over, and I remember the strong feeling of disconnection I experienced when we were released from our duty after 3 weeks of intense involvement. I thought to myself, "we didn't sign up for this", and this was true, we were "chosen" participants. We were in some sort a "captive audience" trying to fulfill our civic responsibility, which involved being exposed to some disturbing evidences.

Vicarious traumatization can lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and as a result jurors can experience flashbacks, loss of sleep, nightmares or night terrors, and a heightened level of anxiety. Post-trial counseling would be a valuable means to preventing and reducing the trauma jurors of violent acts are subjected to, and it would only make sense for the Court system to prevent harm to citizens who are voluntarily exposing themselves to traumatic evidences out of civic duty.

I hope this bill passes,

Thanks,
Lina LePage

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Fw: HB 52
From: "Jeannette Lacey" <j.laceydunn@yahoo.com>
Date: Mon, February 22, 2010 9:40 pm

Hello Everyone,

Please see the attachments regarding a bill introduced by Rep. Kerttula related to providing counseling for jurors who participate in traumatic hearings. She is looking for input and feedback. There is a hearing this Friday. I know she would appreciate your thoughts. You can email Hannah, her aide, at Hannah.McCarty@legis.state.ak.us or you can call the office at 907-465-4767. Please forward on to others who might be able to give feedback. Thank you very much for your time!

Jeannette