



March 17, 2016

The Honorable Tammie Wilson
State Capitol Building
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

RE: House Bill 317 Civil Asset Forfeiture Reform

Dear Representative Wilson:

Few issues before state legislatures today can boast near-unanimous levels of support from the left and the right. Smart reforms to civil asset forfeiture practices are one of those rare points of convergence. Our coalition supporting these reforms, the U.S. Justice Action Network, underscores this very point. We are the largest bipartisan coalition working at the state and federal level to reform civil asset forfeiture practices, and our eight partner organizations, which span the ideological spectrum from the left to the right (and rarely agree on anything), all agree on civil asset forfeiture reform. They include: the ACLU, Americans for Tax Reform, Center for American Progress, the Faith and Freedom Coalition, FreedomWorks, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Right on Crime, and the NAACP.

All of these organizations mark civil asset forfeiture reform as one of their top priorities for reasons ranging from protection of property rights and concern over government overreach, to the disproportionate impact this practice has on socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods and communities of color. For these reasons and so many others, I write today to support House Bill 317, which reforms Alaska's civil asset forfeiture policy and protect fundamental property rights of Alaska residents.

We acknowledge that, in certain circumstances, asset forfeiture *can* be a valuable tool for law enforcement to disarm bad actors in our society. But rapid expansion of this practice without proper procedural protections has left innocent property owners at risk, and scattered law enforcement attention and resources away from criminals.

Right now, current civil asset forfeiture practices allow the government to permanently forfeit cash, cars, real estate, or other property suspected of being connected to criminal activity, even if no criminal charge is ever filed. This practice violates the very foundation of our justice system and raises deep constitutional and due process concerns.

House Bill 317 is a strong step forward in addressing these issues. It would retain asset forfeiture as one of the many tools law enforcement has to address criminal bad actors, while protecting innocent property owners by simply requiring a criminal conviction associated with the property before the forfeiture is final. This legislation would also in-



crease transparency, raise standards of proof, and realign the financial components of forfeiture proceedings.

Alaska must take this step of reforming civil asset forfeiture procedures now. Many states across the country are working on similar efforts or have implemented these reforms, including New Mexico, Montana, Nevada, and others. By reinvigorating constitutional ideals in Alaska's statutes, you can restore public trust in these practices and become a national leader on a critical public safety issue.

When the left and the right agree, it is time to act. Please support and continue working toward the passage of House Bill 317 this legislative session.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Holly Harris". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "H".

Holly Harris
Executive Director, U.S. Justice Action Network