

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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SPONSOR STATEMENT Senate Bill 127

There are a lot of issues facing Alaskans -- but by far the most serious threat is crime. All Alaskans deserve to feel safe in their homes, places of work, and neighborhoods. Thanks to several factors, including recent changes to our criminal justice statutes, more and more Alaskans report not feeling safe.

Since Senate Bill 91 passed, Alaska's crime rates have spiked. In burglary, Alaska jumped from being 25th in the country to 14th. In larceny, Alaska jumped from 13th in the country to second. In property crime overall, Alaska climbed from number 17 in the nation to third. We're in the top 15 in every category of crime for the first time in our history, and we've broken records for vehicle theft - just since Senate Bill 91 passed.

Senate Bill 91 did not cause our crime epidemic, but it does appear to have made a bad situation worse. If we don't acknowledge it's broken, we won't be able to fix it. The good intentions of Senate Bill 91, and the results seen in other states, are meaningless if Alaskans are not safe.

We need to recognize that Senate Bill 91 has not performed as it was intended to. The results have hurt Alaskans, families, and businesses. The public has lost its trust in our criminal justice system, and repealing this law is the first step to gain it back.

The wholesale rewrite of our criminal statutes happened during an economic recession and drug epidemic in Alaska. Our criminal justice system is overwhelmed and not able to keep up with rapid changes required by Senate Bill 91, even after the positive changes made by Senate Bill 54. Lowering sentences, a new bail schedule, and changes to probation and parole have created confusion around our efforts to improve public safety, and this confusion is only helping to fuel our current crime epidemic.

Repealing the law and reviewing the provisions that we agree on, one by one, is the best way to restart this process. We need continued thoughtful, focused dialogue between the Legislature and the public. However, that conversation needs to begin by listening to Alaskans who have been affected by Senate Bill 91.

As long as Senate Bill 91 is still on the books, it will send a message to criminals that we aren't serious about protecting Alaskans. We cannot afford to send that message. It's time for the Legislature to send a new message - by repealing it.