



Suki Miller
Executive Director
Victims For Justice
1057 W. Fireweed Lane, Ste 101
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
E: suki@victimsforjustice.org
P: 907-278-0977

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Judiciary Committee
Chair Senator Claman
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

Dear Chair Senator Claman, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of HB 101. This legislation represents an important step toward protecting young people in Alaska and ensuring that our laws reflect what science, experience, and common sense tell us about adolescent development and vulnerability.

The United States Supreme Court has repeatedly recognized that the adolescent brain is still developing well into early adulthood, particularly the regions responsible for impulse control, judgment, and long-term decision-making. These areas do not fully mature until around age 25. As a result, youth assess risk differently than adults, are more susceptible to impulsive behavior, and often lack what developmental experts call "future orientation"—the ability to fully appreciate long-term consequences. Even older teens tend to focus on immediate rewards and pressures rather than distant outcomes.

The Court has also emphasized that minors are uniquely vulnerable to negative influences, including pressure from peers, family members, and adults. They have limited control over their environments and, in many cases, cannot remove themselves from unsafe or coercive situations. These realities are why many areas of law—such as medical consent, contracts, and military service—do not allow minors to make certain decisions independently. Their developmental stage simply does not equip them to fully understand the nature and consequences of those choices.

It is our responsibility as adults to safeguard young teens as they navigate this formative period of their lives. Unfortunately, there is a subset of offenders who attempt to justify predatory behavior by claiming that young teens are sexually mature, that they "want" adult attention, or that these interactions are mutual. These assertions ignore both developmental science and the inherent power imbalance between adults and minors.

Under current Alaska law, it is legal for an adult to engage in sexual activity with a 16- or 17-year-old who "consents." If that child is assaulted, the burden falls on them to prove they did *not* consent. This framework places an unfair responsibility on minors and fails to account for the developmental, psychological, and social factors that make them particularly vulnerable to manipulation, coercion, and exploitation.

As a society, we criminalize harmful conduct to express collective condemnation and to establish clear boundaries around what is morally unacceptable. Children must remain off-limits to the sexual pursuits of adults. Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds are still in high school. They are learning to drive, celebrating sweet-sixteen birthdays, and preparing for graduation. Their focus should be on education, growth, and healthy development—not on navigating adult sexual relationships or the consequences that can follow.

HB 101 strengthens protections for young teens by reducing opportunities for exploitation and by recognizing the realities of adolescent development. The bill helps shield youth from unwanted sexual contact, coercion, psychological harm, and the early consequences of sexual activity, including pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. It affirms their right to bodily integrity, privacy, and a safe environment in which to mature.

Protecting young people is both a moral obligation and a practical necessity, and this legislation moves Alaska toward a safer and more developmentally informed legal framework.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to the well-being of Alaska's youth.

Sincerely,



Suki Miller, Executive Director
Victims For Justice

VICTIMSFORJUSTICE.ORG

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