

**Patty Burley
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January 6, 2010

Dear Representative Cathy Munoz:

I am writing to you to request your support in ensuring that Youth Courts remain a part of Alaska's legal system. They are invaluable and give so much more than initially may be seen.

Here in Bethel we have a very small youth court still struggling to get squarely off the ground. We have graduated only a handful of youth but I can tell you first-hand the impact such a small project has had on the youth in this area.

While to date we have only graduated a few students, each of those has at one point or another been enrolled at the Bethel Alternative Boarding School (BABS). Each of those youngsters has a unique learning style that makes it difficult for them to fit in or do well in mainstream schools. One of the youngsters was actually a drop-out. Despite those hurdles these teenagers came week after week to the 2 hour-long classes. They studied hard and took both a written final exam and an oral exam. These teenagers who fight so hard just to finish or stay in school actually excelled. They worked incredibly hard and it showed. Each of those teens gained confidence and a sense of accomplishment. A few were on the road to trouble with the law. They were bored, felt they had nothing to offer, and nowhere to go. Youth court changed that for them. It gave them a sense of purpose, a moral compass and a sense of belonging. These individuals will go further than they would have if youth court had not become a part of their lives.

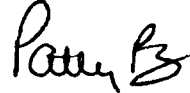
Today I note that there appears to be a strong correlation between underage drinking and crime(s). There is also a strong correlation between underage drinking and trouble at school. Right now we do the best we can for these students via the Community Diversion Panel (CDP). While that is an amazing program that has provided a considerable amount to the community, it is only catching the tip of the iceberg. For many kids, by the time they come to the CDP their problems with alcohol have spiraled out of control. For others, alcohol comes much later in the process - they instead start with truancy and behavior problems at the school. These are the early cries for help. An active youth court would be able to intercede early enough to stem the upcoming tide. It would give minors an opportunity to start anew with the help and support of those whose input they seek the most: their peers.

There are some wonderful youth courts in other areas of Alaska which are at jeopardy as well: Anchorage, Kenai, and Fairbanks just to name a few. These programs have been around a while longer than Bethel's and have made even bigger impacts on the lives of minors. They have also reached out to lend support to those smaller youth courts still working to get established and on more solid ground. These programs are too valuable to lose.

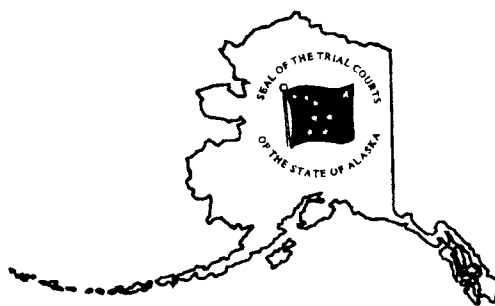
If funding is an issue, I would urge you to consider a Bill that would add significant surcharges for Minor Consuming Alcohol (MCA) cases. The current slap on the wrist for a first MCA is so negligible that many minors view getting an MCA as a badge of honor and not something negative. The fines come from their PFD's and have little, if any, importance. Perhaps the surcharge, due much sooner, will make a bigger impact – at the very least it will generate income that will allow youth courts to continue operating.

I thank you for your consideration into this matter.

Sincerely,



Patty C. Burley
Magistrate



Trial Courts

State of Alaska

Box 869
Wrangell, Alaska, 99929

To Whom It May Concern:

Date: January 8, 2010

Re: Wrangell Youth Court

The purpose of this letter is to express the continued support of the Wrangell Trial Courts for the Wrangell Youth Court program.

Since its inception ten years ago, the Wrangell Youth Court has been widely accepted and respected in the local community. Having youthful offenders appear before a group of their peers has had a very positive effect in this community. Most individuals appearing before the Youth Court successfully complete their requirements and never return to the court.

The youth court provides the added bonus of "hands on" knowledge of the justice system and public service opportunities for its members. They graduate with solid ethical standards and a commitment to public service and the administration of justice.

Although the success of a program is frequently measured by the number of cases or clients handled, that is not really an adequate standard in looking at a youth court program, particularly in a small town. If this court never heard another case, it would be a successful program based on the dedication and commitment of its members.

Thank you for your continued support of the Wrangell Youth Court program. We are looking forward to continuing to work with this program for the next ten years.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Ellis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small notary seal to the left.

Chris Ellis
Magistrate