



REPRESENTATIVE CATHY MUÑOZ

House Bill 331

Youth Court Funding

For the past twenty years the Alaska Youth Court has emerged as one of Alaska's most effective crime prevention programs. It has provided youth offenders and volunteers a better understanding of our legal system with an emphasis on accountability. Youth Courts strategically operate in Alaska communities from Ketchikan to Nome. It is the only diversion program available in District Court to enable individuals to have their cases dismissed without resulting in a criminal record. For many this brief involvement in the justice system is a turning point.

Funding for this program comprises a mix of state funds, the private sector, municipal grants, and federal funds. To help ensure continuation of Alaska's Youth Court program **HB 331** directs a source of funding from a portion of criminal fines. This bill will require the state to account separately for these fines which currently are spent on the general administration of state government. Consequently it will allow the legislature to appropriate up to 25% of criminal fines to support youth courts.

Each youth court is adapted to fit the needs of the individual community. Youth volunteers participate in various roles while youth offenders receive an alternative sanction from the formal justice system. In 2002 the Urban Institute, a non-partisan, policy research non-profit, studied teen courts in four states. The study compared recidivism outcomes for youth courts with youth handled by our regular juvenile justice systems. The results indicated only 6% of offenders in the Anchorage program were back in court within a six month period compared to 18% by the regular juvenile justice system.

Using criminal fines to pay for crime prevention makes sense for Alaska's future. **HB 331** will provide a means for the legislature to allocate funds annually and support this effective, worthwhile, and cost efficient program.

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