

January 20, 2012

Senator Hollis French, Chair
State Capitol, Room 417
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Senate Bill 135, Continuances in Criminal Cases

Dear Senator French:

Standing Together Against Rape (STAR) strongly supports any bill that affords a victim of crime the opportunity to have their voice and concerns heard by the justice system. Senate Bill 135 appears to strengthen "the right to a timely disposition of the case following the arrest of the accused" as stated in the Alaska Constitution.

Crime victims, in particular, victims of sexual assault feel a tremendous amount of anxiety when contemplating facing the person who assaulted them in court. The anxiety builds, creating sleepless nights and increased reliance on coping skills. The day arrives, and the trial is continued. This pattern can be repeated over and over and over again. If the offender is incarcerated the victim is afraid they will be released. If the offender is not incarcerated the victim feels they must continue watching over their shoulder at the market, the department store, the movies, etc. The ability of the victim to move about freely may be inhibited.

While I believe it is not the intent of prosecution to re-victimize crime victims, repeated continuances often do. At the same time STAR recognizes the need for the prosecution to put forth a strong case, to increase the possibility of conviction, to hear defense requests and to lessen the likelihood of appeal. Hopefully this bill will allow for a balance to be struck between the two.

Respectfully submitted,

Standing Together Against Rape
Nancy A Haag, MSW
Executive Director