

SB

257



Senator Dennis Egan

Senate Bill 257

Youth Court Funding

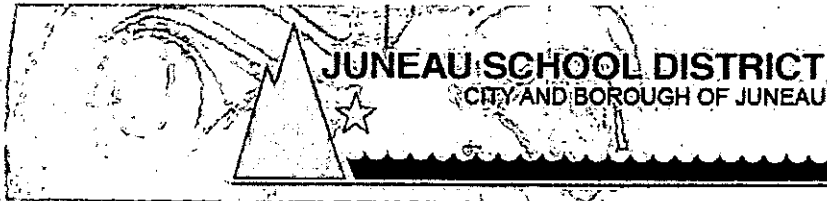
Youth Courts are one of Alaska's most effective crime prevention programs. For more than 20 years, youth courts have boasted an eight percent recidivism rate – dramatically lower than the traditional juvenile justice system. Youth courts save our state money, and deliver on the constitution's promise of a trial by one's peers. SB 257 provides a stable source of state investment.

Alaska has one of the strongest Youth Court statutes in the United States. It allows nonprofit and municipal youth courts to handle cases in which youths are accused of misdemeanors, violations, and alcohol crimes. A minor accused of breaking the law is tried, represented, and adjudicated by the minor's peers, with assistance and oversight from volunteer attorneys.

A comprehensive mix of state support, municipal grants, private sector funds, volunteers and federal money keep Alaska's youth courts functioning. SB 257 designates a source for state dollars to go to youth courts: criminal fines. Today, criminal fines are spent on the general administration of state government. SB 257 would require government to account separately for these fines, and allow the legislature to appropriate up to 25 percent of the funds to support youth courts.

Alaska's 12 youth courts operate in communities from Ketchikan to Nome. Alaska's youth courts are tailored to their local communities. Some only sentence youths who have admitted guilt. Others take cases from shortly after arrest through jury trials. But all Alaska Youth Courts relieve a tremendous burden from the traditional juvenile justice system. By providing significant attention to even the smallest infractions, young offenders are held accountable in a meaningful way. By diverting minor offenses, youth courts free highly trained youth corrections staff at the Department of Health & Social Services to focus valuable time and energy on turning around the hard cases.

Youth courts provide a valuable service to Alaskan and are a wise investment. Using criminal fines to pay for crime prevention makes sense.



Office of the Assistant Superintendent • 10014 Crazy Horse Drive • Juneau, Alaska 99801 • (907) 523-1704

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in support of legislation that would provide sustainable funding for youth court programs in Juneau and other communities in Alaska. For over a decade Juneau Youth Court has provided a vital and important service to the City and Borough of Juneau.

Juneau Youth Court is a diversion program that removes young people who are first time offenders from the traditional juvenile justice system and handles the case in a court of peers. The program works with families to ensure that teens are held accountable for their actions and that consequences are constructive and tailored to the individual youth thereby benefiting both the young person and the community at large. Last year Juneau Youth Court ordered over 600 hours of community work service that were completed at Zach Gordon Youth Center, the American Red Cross, Meals on Wheels, the Glory Hole, the Salvation Army, and at schools throughout Juneau School District.

On average Juneau Youth Court serves 50 youth each year handling referrals from both District Court and Juvenile Justice Probation Officers. This frees up the court and probation officers to handle more serious offenders and helps to reduce their large caseloads. Youth Courts have the additional advantage of educating the youth who volunteer for the program. Youth Court advocates reap the benefits of learning about the legal system, performing meaningful community service, and gaining the opportunity to help their peers.

Juneau Youth Court operates on a very small budget of \$35,000 per year with one part time paid staff person, two dozen volunteer student advocates, a community advisory board including representatives from the Police Department, the Division of Juvenile Justice, the legal community, and community partners. The program offers an important service to the community at a very low cost.

Juneau Youth Court is just one example of a successful diversion program known as youth court. Around the state Youth Courts are doing important work for Alaska by addressing juvenile crime in its earliest stage. I strongly urge you to support legislation that would provide sustainable funding to support these community-based programs.

Sincerely,

Laury Scandling

February 12, 2010

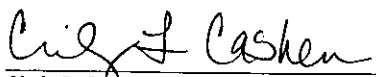
The Juneau Youth Court Community Advisory Board supports House Bill 331 and Senate Bill 257, "*an Act relating to funding for youth courts; and relating to accounting for criminal fines*". This legislation would appropriate 25 percent of the court fines imposed under AS 12.55.035 to established and operating youth courts. Federal funding will not be available after this year and the future of the Alaska Youth courts depend upon state and local ownership.

A recent study shows Alaska Youth Courts to be among the most effective in the nation. According to the Urban Institute's Evaluation of Teen Courts Project, which was based on four teen court programs studied in four different states (Alaska, Maryland, Arizona, and Missouri), the six-month recidivism figures among the programs ranged from 6 percent to 9 percent. Alaska's recidivism rate was the lowest of these four states, and compared to the recidivism rate of 18 percent for the regular juvenile justice system, shows that youth who go through youth courts are significantly less inclined to re-offend within the following year.

The primary function of youth court programs is to determine a fair and restorative sentence for young offenders. Youth courts are programs in which youth sentence their peers for minor delinquent and status offenses and other problem behaviors. According to the National Youth Court Database, in 1994 there were only 78 youth court programs in operation; as of October, 2006, there were over 1127 youth court programs in operation in 49 states and the District of Columbia.

The Alaska Youth Courts is a vital form of community justice and reweaves the fabric of community by forging a partnership between local governmental entities, the private sector, and community groups to facilitate the performance by private citizens of the functions that were once performed by the extended family, neighborhood, and school.

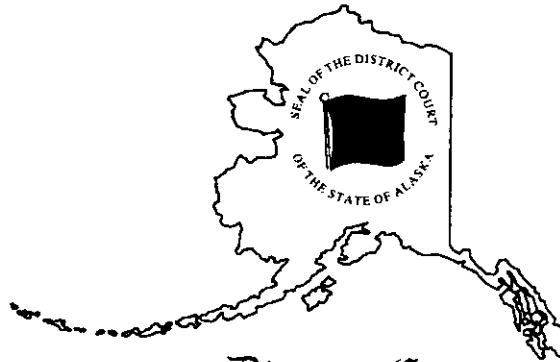
Sincerely,



Cindy L. Cashen

President

Juneau Youth Court Community Advisory Board



District Court
State of Alaska
FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT

KEITH B. LEVY
Judge

P.O. BOX 114100
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-4100

(907) 463-4730
FAX (907) 463-3788

Juneau Youth Court/JDHS
10014 Crazy Horse Drive
Juneau, AK 99801
Attn: Beth Leban-Coordinator

Tuesday, January 26, 2010

Dear Beth:

I am writing to express my appreciation for the work done by the Juneau Youth Court. The Youth Court is an integral sentencing option for students under the age of 18 who are charged with consuming or possessing alcohol for the first time.

As you know, students who choose the Youth Court option are given the opportunity to have their District Court case dismissed if they successfully complete the Youth Court requirements. For some, this brief involvement in the criminal justice system is a turning point. Those who choose Youth Court and succeed are far less likely to return to District Court on other criminal charges. The students benefit because they end up with no conviction on their record. And the community benefits because the Youth Court graduates are contributing to the community rather than causing harm to themselves and others.

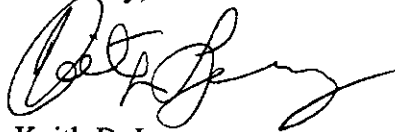
The Youth Court is the only diversion program available in District Court to enable individuals to have their cases dismissed without resulting in a criminal record. The trust the program has earned from both the District Court and the prosecution is a testament to the value and integrity of the program.

I appreciate that you or another representative of the Youth Court always attends the arraignment hearings for minor consuming. The information you provide to the students about Youth Court is invaluable and helps them understand their options in the justice system.

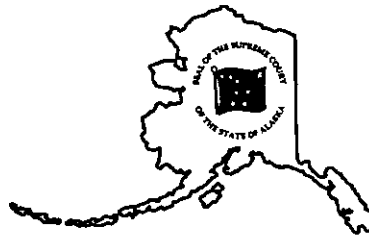
Finally, the Youth Court program provides an opportunity for students to be judged by their peers. I believe this is valuable because the students in the program have far more information about the defendants than is provided to me in formal sentencing proceedings. The Youth Court is able to impose consequences that are more meaningful than the limited options I have when sentencing.

Thanks again for the important service the Youth Court provides to the community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith B. Levy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Keith B. Levy



Mary P. Treiber
MAGISTRATE

Alaska Court System

415 Main Street
Ketchikan, AK 99901
(907) 225-3195; FAX (907) 225-7849

February 5, 2010

Margaret McCloy
Executive Director
Ketchikan Youth Court
2417 Tongass Avenue, Suite 215
Ketchikan, AK 99901

Dear Ms. McCloy:

As the Magistrate for the Ketchikan Trial Courts, I am the judicial officer who most frequently deals with school age teenagers charged by the State of Alaska and the City of Ketchikan with violations of laws or ordinances prohibiting possession or consumption of alcohol by minors, establishing curfews, and prohibiting possession or use of tobacco products by minors. The existence of and the programs offered by the Ketchikan Youth Court provide me with a meaningful sentencing alternative in dealing with these cases.

The KYC process teaches teens referred by the court to KYC about the court process itself, and provides a group of same-age and same-interests teens for these youthful defendants to work with. The resolution of cases through KYC requires engagement of both the defendant and that teen's parents, ultimately strengthening the family abilities to deal with problems a defendant is having as expressed through these quasi-criminal charges. The Court System sees fewer recidivists among those teens who are referred to and who successfully complete the KYC program.

KYC has added the Prime for Life alcohol information classes, and has agreed to make the class available to teens other than those actively participating in the full KYC program. This is a good program, and adds significantly to the resources available within Ketchikan.

I fully support Ketchikan Youth Court.

Sincerely,

Mary P. Treiber
Magistrate