

Alaska State Legislature House of Representatives



Representative Beth Kerttula PRESS RELEASE • April 18, 2010

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NEW LAW PROTECTS CITIZEN JURORS

Counseling available when civic duty becomes traumatic

(JUNEAU) – Alaska judges may now offer post-trial counseling to jurors traumatized by service in trials involving extraordinarily graphic, gruesome, or emotional evidence or testimony. Representative Beth Kerttula’s (D-Juneau) House Bill 52 passed the Senate late tonight, and now goes to the governor for final approval.

“HB 52 came about after a constituent shared her experiences after serving on a trial in 2006,” Rep. Kerttula said. “Jurors had to view graphic photographs and listen to extremely graphic testimony about the torture and murder of an Alaska woman. Offering proper counseling can help people cope with their normal reactions to abnormal events, provide tools to adapt to those reactions, take care of citizens’ welfare, and enhance positive public attitudes toward jury service.”

The jury system is a fundamental component of the American legal system. Citizen jurors are asked to carry out a civic duty and occasionally face the possibility of experiencing excessive levels of stress, yet no support is offered to help jurors cope with normal reactions to abnormal events. At its worst, jurors can suffer from a milder version of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Categorized as secondary trauma, jurors become traumatized through the traumatic experience of victims.

HB 52 allows judges to offer 10 hours of post-trial group counseling to jurors who serve in difficult criminal trials. This bill would not apply to every juror in every case. Counseling sessions are necessary in only a small percentage of trials but are nonetheless highly valuable when needed.

“In order to protect the integrity of this fundamental component of the American legal system legal system I think courts are obligated to help improve the jury experience, including addressing juror stress,” Rep. Kerttula said. “As the government compels citizens to report for jury duty, it should minimize the burden it places on jurors. By passing HB 52, Alaska will be among the first to honor the service our fellow citizens provide to the judicial system and to all of us by providing help when they need it.”

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