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Senate President Rick Halford

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HALFORD BILL PROMOTES VPSO PROGRAM **SB 145 increases VPSO benefits and provides for village parole and probation**

(JUNEAU) – Sen. Rick Halford (R-Chugiak) introduced legislation today that would increase benefits for Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs), and increase probation services in rural Alaska.

VPSO's are the front line of public protection in our smallest communities. VPSOs are dedicated to their state, their job, and their community. Senate Bill 145 recognizes the importance of VPSOs to rural Alaska by providing advancement opportunities, and the ability to participate in the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS). Most VPSOs do not currently have any retirement benefits.

“VPSOs are incredibly valuable to our villages, and when they take on these positions they accept considerable responsibilities, with very little support or recognition,” said Halford. “Providing retirement benefits will not only be beneficial to VPSOs individually, but will provide an inducement to remain in the program, and in turn, help reduce turnover and subsequent training costs.”

SB 145 would also expand the VPSO program to provide supervision services for individuals on probation or parole. As a result of an initiative sponsored by Halford in 1999 and 2000, communities in rural Alaska recently participated in a supervision pilot program based in Dillingham. The acknowledgement by the Departments of Corrections and Public Safety that the pilot program was a success made it clear home-community supervision should be implemented in villages statewide.

“An offender has a much greater chance of successfully completing their probation if they are able to return to their home village and its support network of their family and community rather than having to stay in a regional center for probation where drugs, alcohol and lack of family support make successful completion unlikely,” said Halford. “SB 145 not only provides an opportunity to improve pay and benefits for our VPSOs, but will also make parole and probation services available in villages.”

Halford has been joined by Senators Ward (Anchorage-Kenai), Lincoln (Interior Alaska), Hoffman (Western Alaska), Olson (Northern Alaska) and Austerman (Kodiak-Southeast Islands) in support of this legislation to improve public safety in rural Alaska.

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Comments from Sen. Halford are on the Majority Actuality Line, 800-478-6540.