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### **Governor Sarah Palin Signs Civil Legal Services Bill**

August 1, 2007, Anchorage AK - On Tuesday, Governor Sarah Palin signed into law a bill that sets up a civil legal services fund in support of Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC). The new law creates a designated program receipt, consisting of the 50% of any state court punitive damages award which under current law is forfeited into the state's general fund.

Present at the signing ceremony were Sen. Lesil McGuire, sponsor of SB 69, representatives from ALSC and supporters from AARP. Sen. McGuire marshaled a great deal of bipartisan support and other co-sponsorships as the bill went through the Legislature. A mirror bill in the House, HB75, was introduced by Reps. Ramras (Fairbanks) and Ledoux (Kodiak) who also played a role in the successful passage of SB 69.

Andy Harrington, Executive Director of ALSC, said: "If you're a poor Alaskan who breaks into your neighbor's house, the state will give you an attorney, to make sure that the prosecution properly proves its case. But if the Flybynight Mortgage Company is trying to take your home away from you and your family, you're on your own; there's no right to an appointed attorney. That's where legal aid has to come in. It's vital that the state help address the need for such legal aid, and that's why we're so grateful to Sen. McGuire and those who have worked with her to bring this about."

The legislature last gave ALSC an appropriation in fiscal year 2004. The fiscal year 2005 appropriation was line-item vetoed by former Gov. Murkowski.

The creation of the fund does not guarantee a steady flow of funds to the corporation. The State has received varying amounts annually in past years, from a low of zero to a high of \$300,000. Because of the state constitutional prohibition on dedicated funds, it will continue to be up to future Legislatures to appropriate any funds during each session.

For 41 years, ALSC has responded to the civil legal needs of low-income Alaskans who otherwise would go without legal assistance. Online donations to the Robert Hickerson Partners in Justice campaign can be made at [www.partnersinjustice.org](http://www.partnersinjustice.org).

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