

REAA funding may change

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The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT) will no longer have to automatically award school construction funds to Rural Education Attendance Districts (REAA) upon application, under a measure tentatively approved by the Senate last week.

The big difference is accomplished through a small word change, in which "shall" is reduced to "may" in a bill governing dispersal of rural school construction money.

If the revised language receives final approval, DOT could refuse to fund school construction if it was decided the bid warranted review.

"It will give them a chance to see if there are any problems," said Sen. Frank Ferguson (D-Kotzebue), sponsor of the

amendment.

Presently, DOT must release funding upon the request of the REAAs. But, according to one DOT official, contractor bids from at least two districts are significantly higher than what the department planned. DOT wants control over the distribution of award money so it will not end up having to ask the legislature for more money to complete the rural school construction program.

Ferguson supports granting DOT prerogative, although Sen. George Hohman (D-Bethel) does not.

The amendment will be reconsidered by the Senate this week and must also be approved by the House of Representatives.

Regionalization

Although a measure to approach fish and game management on a regional advisory basis

has lain dormant in the House Rules Committee since April 6, some lawmakers say the issue may resurface.

Rules Committee chairman, Rep. Sam Cotten (D-Anchorage) said the bill, which has been substituted and rewritten several times, may be considered this week. But he does not know when it will be placed on the House calendar.

The Senate has not considered any similar measure. The legislature is expected to adjourn by the first week in May. If a regionalization bill does not make it, regulations recently adopted by the joint Boards of Fish and Game will remain in place. Those guidelines establish regional advisory councils which propose regulations to the statewide boards.

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Sentencing

Companion pieces of legislations creating a committee to conduct an \$85,000 study of patterns in minority sentencing will soon become law. While lawmakers have okayed the bills, the House must still concur with a language change by the Senate.

A report on the effects of banning plea bargaining, released last fall, indicate Natives and Blacks receive harsher sentences than Caucasians under comparable circumstances.