

HB 523 could shift view of sobriety and alcoholism

by Anna M. Pickett
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Recognizing that alcohol and drug abuse presents an immediate danger to the lives, health and well-being of all Alaskans, the Alaska Federation of Natives and the Alaska Council on Preventing Alcohol and Drug Abuse are supporting passage of House Bill No. 523.

"It (HB 523) represents a positive paradigm shift in the state's policy for preventing alcohol and drug abuse in Alaska," said Greg Nothstine, AFN Sobriety Movement Coordinator to the House of Representatives' Committee on Health, Education and Social Services (HESS) during the 19th Alaska State Legislature. "HB 523 speaks to the legitimate recognition by the state of Alaska for a preferred lifestyle now being practiced by thousands of Alaskans and commonly referred to or known as sobriety."

Nothstine said HB 523 favors and follows the conventional wisdom for reinforcing socially appropriate behav-

iors and choices that are conducive to:

- helping improve the quality of life and health for individuals, families and communities;
- helping reduce the incidence of alcohol and drug related crimes; and
- helping reduce the burden on government in exhausting its resources and having to pay for the many social ills and problems caused by alcohol and drug abuse.

The Bill

The text of the bill reads:

"An Act expressing the state's policy with respect to sobriety.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Alaska:

*Section 1. AS 47.37.010 is amended to read:

Sec. 47.37.010 DECLARATION OF POLICY. It is the policy of the state to recognize, appreciate, and reinforce the example set by its citizens who lead, believe in, and support a life of sobriety. It is also the policy of the state that alcoholics and

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intoxicated persons should not be criminally prosecuted for their consumption of alcoholic beverages and that they should be afforded a continuum of treatment that can introduce them to, and help them learn, new life skills and social skills that would be useful to them in attaining and maintaining [SO THEY MAY LEAD] normal lives as productive members of society."

(New text underlined, bracketed text deleted.)

"You have two terms here that you need to recognize, sobriety and alcoholism," said C. Joe DiMatteo, Executive Director of the Alaska Council. "It's important to help people lead healthy, productive lives."

The purpose of the law is to afford alcoholics and intoxicated persons a continuum of treatment, rather than subject them to criminal prosecution. It establishes a comprehensive program for the treatment of alcoholism as a disease, operated by the Division of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse.