

Department of Law Expands . . .

Fairbanks Office in Care of Northern Two Thirds

The Department of Law's consumer protection program has been expanded to initiate services for Alaskans in the northern two thirds of the State from an office in Fairbanks, Attorney General John E. Havelock said today.

"Complaints and inquiries from people in that area should be directed to Mr. William Christian, head of the Attorney General's Office, Civil Division, in Fairbanks," Havelock said.

Communities in the second and fourth judicial districts generally will be served by the Fairbanks office. The two districts include most of Alaska in and north of the Yukon-Kuskokwim drainage, and north of the Alaska Range.

Complaints from the Bethel area, however, should be directed to Stanley Howitt, head of the Consumer Protection Division of the Attorney General's Office in Anchorage.

"We are working now on a method to distribute complaint forms and consumer information to Alaskan bush communities and hope to have it perfected soon," Havelock said.

He said that meanwhile persons in doubt where to send a complaint "can write directly to the consumer protection section of the Department of Law in Anchorage or Fairbanks, or contact the nearest district attorney."

The Attorney General said that Christian will be handling the legal aspects of consumer protection matters "in addition to his other responsibilities, using existing Department of Law secretarial staff and investigators's services."

He said the consumer protection program would work in conjunction with the State Troopers, the Chamber of Commerce, consumer protection groups and other individuals and organizations who are interested in its efforts.

Havelock said that once this portion of the consumer protection program has been operating long enough to establish the level of demand for services, "we will review it to make certain it is functioning effectively, both in Fairbanks and in the large rural area served by the Fairbanks office."

He said the consumer protection program recognized that most Alaskan businessmen are "people of integrity who respect their customers."

Its attention will be directed toward "that minority of in-state and out-of-state businesses that are engaging in unfair or deceptive practices," Havelock said.

He said that in addition to acting on the complaints that come through the Fairbanks office, Christian intends to "meet with individuals and groups and hold hearings if necessary to determine where the consumer protection division may be of help."

Havelock cautioned, however, that "while various business transactions may make people justifiably unhappy, the office can only take action where there has been a violation of the law."

"We will look carefully at every complaint that comes in to see if a violation has taken place and follow up vigorously wherever we can," he said.

The initiation of a consumer protection program in Fairbanks follows by some six weeks the opening of a consumer protection office in Anchorage and a re-ordering of the Attorney General's Office in Juneau to focus more strongly on rate questions and other broad matters that affect Alaskan consumers.

Havelock said that consumer protection services similar to those now available in Fairbanks "are scheduled to be extended

to other areas of the State as soon as arrangements can be made."