



**REPRESENTATIVE CHUCK KOPP
DISTRICT 24
Klatt Road – Oceanview – Southport – Bayshore**

**Sponsor Statement
House Bill 216
Establishing the Restorative Justice Account**

The Alaska State Constitution recognizes the rights of crime victims through Article I, Section 24. Restitution is one of those rights. Unfortunately, the outstanding balance of court-ordered restitution payments to victims has remained very high and victims find themselves waiting for several years to receive restitution payments. The current balance of outstanding court-ordered restitution is over \$98 million.

There is a mechanism in place to help victims through the criminal fund established by the Legislature in 1988 to assist crime victims, but over time, most of the criminal funds have been used to pay for inmate healthcare costs and the amount to assist victims has fallen off sharply. HB 216 seeks to restore a balance, clear ambiguities, and prioritize restoring victims to a pre-offense condition.

In 1988, the Legislature passed a law that made certain criminal offenders ineligible to receive a Permanent Fund Dividend and stated intent language that the money that would have gone to the offenders would go to support victims of crimes. A criminal fund was established to be administered by the Violent Crimes Compensation Board for which appropriations from the dividend fund could be made. Since establishment of the criminal fund, there have been many statutory changes to eligible recipients causing the original legislative intent to be lost and victims of crimes are no longer a priority.

House Bill 216 establishes an account titled the Restorative Justice Account. It prioritizes the use of the funds and clarifies that the Violent Crime Compensation Board and restitution payments to victims will be priorities. It enables the Alaska Court System (ASC) to qualify for appropriations from this fund and authorizes them to pay court-ordered restitution to victims of crimes. This bill does not eliminate an offender's liability to pay restitution, fines, and other fees imposed to them through the criminal justice system. Additionally, HB 216 adds language authorizing use of the funds for substance abuse and mental health services for offenders.

HB 216 will reestablish victim restitution as our highest priority.