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Members of the House
Judiciary Committee
Finance Committee

Dear Members,

I have been a resident of Alaska for 34 years and a licensed Marriage and Family therapist in private practice here in Juneau. I have been employed by numerous social service agencies and have also worked under contract.

There are many reasons that I am happy to live in this state and, especially, in this city. I consider it was an enlightened move when Alaska abolished the death penalty. Why any legislator would choose to reverse this action five decades afterwards is not rational. Not a deterrent. Not financially responsible. And, I believe, morally reprehensible.

I want to describe some of my own experience relating to the state prison system. In 1985, I wrote a grant proposal and developed the Substance Abuse Treatment Program at Hemon Creek Correctional Center, here in Juneau. I facilitated the education classes and conducted both individual and group therapy sessions for inmates in this maximum security prison. At that time, Hemon Creek was the only facility in the state for those convicted of the most serious and violent crimes - rapes, assaults, armed robbery, murders.

Sometimes I felt uneasy leading a group in a distant room near the gymnasium, with no staff oversight or ability to call for help. But I was never threatened and

actually had more hostility and obstructive behavior directed at me from guards who believed that prisons were for punishment only. They resented and interfered with college teachers, counselors and even chaplains. The idea of rehabilitation was generally scorned. I was disturbed by this attitude.

Also disturbing was the disproportionate numbers of Alaska Native inmates. Though the population statewide was about 17 percent, it was about 40% at this penal institution. I heard many devastating personal stories, especially from persons from the more remote villages. One young man, aged 24, told of being responsible for the care of his six brothers and sisters, at the age of twelve. His father had died in a snowmobile accident while under the influence and his mother was an alcoholic and wasn't at home for the children. He scrounged for food. Another man described his inability to attend school because of the demands and beatings by both his mother and father who drank excessively and fought all the time. Alcohol seemed to have played a part in most of the offenses committed.

Some inmates in my program had sentences so long they had no anticipation of being released within their lifetime. This prison was so far away from home village and family that they never had any visitors either. If they were deemed too dangerous to return to the "Street", life sentence without parole would certainly protect the public.

At any rate, the Substance Abuse Treatment Program seemed to offer them a welcome break in an otherwise dismal routine and they were active participants. Work in the kitchen or an opportunity to make furniture or grow plants was earned by a lucky few.

As a family counselor, I have worked with residents from Halfway Houses, co-led

men's Anger Management groups, both in-patient and out-patient substance abuse clients, counseled both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, young people who have dropped-out or run away from dysfunctional family systems. There is a great unmet need for additional funding for educational and social services, for both preventive programs and rehabilitation programs.

Alaska should fund more in-state facilities and programs. The money it would take to construct new buildings, staff and train additional correction officers and establish many more public defenders to provide for reinstatement of the death penalty could be directed toward a much more effective community health and safety expenditure of public funds.

I urge you to kill House Bill No. 9
— not human beings.

Yours sincerely,
Dixie A. Hood