

JUNEAU REENTRY COALITION

February 27, 2014

Dear Chairman Coghill,

Thank you for introducing Senate Bill 64 to address Alaska's rising corrections costs. Today, Alaska faces declining revenue and the need for extreme fiscal restraint. As you know, last year the Alaska Department of Corrections (DOC) opened the Goose Creek Correctional Center at a cost of \$250 million to Alaskans with an annual operating budget of \$50 million. If the state's prison population continues to grow at its current rate of 3% per year, the state's prisons will be full by 2016.

This creates an inescapable reality, Alaskans must start looking to build and fund another prison, or look at proven best practice approaches that more effectively address criminality, reduce recidivism and build safer and healthier Alaskan communities.

Currently, 2 out of 3 Alaskan prisoners return to custody within the first three years of release at a cost of \$159 dollars per inmate per day. SB 64 aims to determine how Alaskans can get better value for their criminal justice dollars spent by establishing the Alaska Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC). The ACJC will evaluate the effect of laws and practices on the criminal justice system to determine whether those laws and practices provide for maximum public safety while yielding the maximum benefit from our money spent. The other provisions in SB 64 are intended to bend the corrections cost curve, and to provide incentives and tools for offenders to help themselves successfully reintegrate once released from supervision.

All of these statutory changes ascribe to the philosophy that has proven true in Texas and a whole host of tough on crime states: low-risk, nonviolent offenders can be effectively supervised in the community at a significantly lower cost, and will help keep prison beds available for violent criminals while holding non-violent offenders accountable for their actions. Research shows that implementation of evidence-based practices leads to an average decrease in crime of between 10% and 20%. Experience in other states further reveals that with the implementation of these evidence-based approaches, states have successfully cut corrections costs and reduced crime while at the same time improving offender outcomes and ensuring public safety.

SB 64 uses evidence-based practices and a cross-governmental approach to reform by focusing resources on high-risk offenders, supporting mandatory supervision and treatment in the community, and using real-time data and information to drive policy-making decisions. Evidence shows that it is possible for Alaska to cut our rising corrections costs without sacrificing public safety. We can't afford to do nothing.

Juneau Reentry Coalition strongly supports SB 64 and appreciates your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,


Kathryn Chapman, MSW

Chair