

mind of those doing the inspecting. This greatly impedes a person's ability to find employment, rent an apartment and to live a life free of stigmatization for a crime for which the person was never convicted.

Numerous individuals – both men and woman – in Alaska are arrested for the crime of Assault in the Fourth Degree. A person may be charged with this offense if a police officer concludes there is probable cause to believe that a person by “words or other conduct recklessly places another person in fear of imminent physical injury.”¹

AS18.65.530 appropriately provides that in a domestic relations context, when a person reports to the police that she/he was placed in fear of imminent physical injury, the police must arrest the alleged offender for Domestic Violence Assault when the officer decides there is probable cause to believe the assault took place.

Needless to say, police officers taxed with a tremendous amount of work have to make snap decisions when deciding if there is probable cause to believe an assault occurred. The soundness of the police officer's decision often depends on the experience of the officer and the officer's perceived need to diffuse a situation.

After the person is arrested and charged, a prosecutor later has more time to review the merits of the case. In some cases, upon more careful review and with the benefit of additional facts, the prosecutor determines the charge doesn't merit prosecution and dismisses it. The individual arrested, however, is forever stigmatized by his arrest. It will forever be a part of the Alaska Court System records available for public inspection.

A good number of cases filed in Alaska are ultimately dismissed. For example, in FY 13, the state filed 6,675 felony cases. Of those, the state dismissed 1,289 cases. Of the 29,562 misdemeanor cases filed, the state dismissed 9,508.²

Our constitutional right to due process of law is intended to protect citizens from being treated as convicted persons without first being afforded certain procedural safeguards. That is the way it should be and it is our responsibility to uphold our system of criminal justice, the shining example and envy of other countries.

There are those who would have you believe that their individual judgment is more knowing than the collective wisdom of a jury; that a person's record should forever be stigmatized by an arrest and charge even though the prosecutor dismissed the charge or a jury of his peers acquitted him of the charge. These same individuals would have you believe that an arrest should be equated to conviction of crime. Alaska citizens, judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys will always have different

¹ AS 11.41.230, a class A misdemeanor offense.

² Data provided by the Alaska Court System on February 26, 2014.

