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**TO:** Alaska Criminal Justice Commission

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**SUBJECT:** Victim/Survivor/Advocate Roundtables Summary Report and Priorities

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Crime victims, survivors and victim advocates are important stakeholders in the work of the Alaska Criminal Justice Commission. Two Roundtable discussions were held in September 2015 to provide survivors and advocates with an overview of the Commission's work to date and future activities, and to seek their input in establishing priorities for crime victims and those who serve them in Alaska for review by the Commission. The Roundtable discussions were augmented by interviews with five survivors and nine victim advocates in Anchorage and Fairbanks.

There were 18 survivors, advocates and justice professionals at the Fairbanks Roundtable on September 16, and 11 survivors, advocates and justice professionals at the Bethel Roundtable on September 18. The second Roundtable sought to identify issues and concerns of victims and advocates in remote and bush jurisdictions in Alaska. Victim advocates at both Roundtables represented both community and system-based victim assistance services. A list of Roundtable participants is included at the end of this memorandum.

### **Welcome and Overview**

At the Fairbanks Roundtable, Commission Member Brenda Stanfill, Executive Director of the Interior Alaska Center for Nonviolent Living, welcomed participants on behalf of the Commission and emphasized the importance of the Roundtables in identifying the most important needs of Alaska crime victims, as well as gaps in victim services. Commission Member Senator John Coghill noted that effective justice reform efforts require input and support from those most directly affected by crime – victims and survivors – and the victim assistance professionals who serve them.

At both Roundtables, Terry Schuster of The Pew Charitable Trusts provided an overview of the Commission's work and initial findings to date (a summary of this presentation has been emailed to all Roundtable participants).

10. Efforts should be undertaken in Alaska to improve language accessibility in all criminal justice communications and documents.
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### **Victim/Survivor Issues Unique to Remote and Bush Communities in Alaska**

The advice offered at the Bethel Roundtable to “think about bush regions differently than you might think of urban areas” is very important for the Commission to consider. As one participant noted, “there is no comparison.”

The dynamics in isolated communities in Alaska are different from other regions of the state. The majority of villages have fewer than 500 residents and there is often over-crowding. In many cases, victims and offenders are within the same family or are neighbors. There may be “contradictory dynamics” with some families seeking healing and other families being very upset and angry in the aftermath of crime. In cases involving suicide or homicide, everyone is affected, and behavioral health providers try to facilitate healing within villages after violent deaths.

Crime and victimization in bush regions of Alaska are detrimentally affected by very high and disproportional rates of alcohol abuse, which includes both biological and psychological factors; racial disparities in Alaska’s justice system; disproportionate numbers of Alaska Natives who are victims and convicted offenders; and high rates of poverty and unemployment, among other factors.

Some participants felt that law enforcement interactions with villages “are not positive.” There is often a lack of understanding about court and criminal justice processes; sometimes innocent people simply plead guilty because they don’t understand the process. This can result in people getting trapped in the system and being re-arrested over and over again, and victims who often feel “like they are the one in trouble.” In addition, Alaska State Troopers have many roles. For example, the Alaska Wildlife Trooper who issues citations or confiscates nets is the same person to call for domestic violence and sexual assault, which creates a barrier to reporting such crimes.

Outreach to victims in remote regions is difficult and expensive. Current efforts to partner with tribal councils and Alaska Legal Services to promote awareness of victim services need to be expanded.

Battered women face many barriers to justice and healing:

- When judges allow an offender to stay in the home, the victim (often with children) has to leave
- The alleged perpetrator may be a person in a leadership position in the village

## **Rape Kit Examinations**

There is currently no capacity to conduct rape kit examinations in remote/bush villages, with Community Health Aides saying this is beyond the scope of their work. Adults and children who are sexually assaulted in these communities must travel to hub hospitals for exams which, in the aftermath of sexual assault, is highly traumatic and can contribute to the contamination of evidence (such as the victim's clothing). In addition, such travel may take days due to inclement weather or other factors unique to remote Alaska. The onsite provision of rape kit exams, with follow-up medical care at health facilities in larger communities offered to victims, would reduce unnecessary victim trauma and improve evidence in sexual assault cases. Community Health Aides and Public Health Nurses in Alaska villages can be trained to conduct basic rape kit examinations and preserve evidence for investigations and prosecutions.

Victim assistance services in remote and bush communities in Alaska should be strengthened to promote justice, healing and wellness, including (but not limited to) augmenting the leadership of village elders to support prevention efforts and victims who need help; the creation of "safe homes" for victims and survivors within villages; the encouragement and implementation of restorative justice practices that hold offenders accountable and promote victim safety and community involvement; expanded outreach to increase awareness of available victim services; and statewide training of Community Health Aides and Public Health Nurses to conduct basic rape kit examinations in villages.

## **Prevention and Bystander Intervention**

One of the most significant budget cuts in Alaska is the \$2.7 million reduction in prevention programs and services. The *Alaska Safe Children's Act* which, among other activities, teaches students about dating violence and prevention, was signed into law in July 2015 with no appropriations for implementation. Alaska survivors spoke eloquently about how their chronic victimizations might have been prevented if someone who knew what was happening to them had said something, offered help or otherwise intervened. And participants from remote/bush regions indicated that prevention budget cuts have detrimentally affected their ability to teach children how to be sober and how to ask for help when they are victimized.

The "Green Dot" program (<http://greendotalaska.com/>) has been recently introduced in Alaska. Green Dot seeks to prepare "organizations and communities to implement a strategy of violence prevention that consistently, measurably reduces power-based personal violence" through "strategic planning, bystander mobilization, persuasive communication, coalition building, etc."

There is strong support among survivors and advocates for programs and services focused on crime prevention and bystander intervention, which ultimately can contribute to less crime and fewer victims.

for offender supervision that provide reasonable protection and safeguard other victims' rights should be expanded.

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## **Prisons**

Concerns were expressed about prisons' lack of ability to effectively diagnose Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder and the lack of effective services for inmates with FASD.

The many prisoners with mental health challenges and the lack of providers to serve inmates with substance abuse and other mental health problems were also of concern. When an offender is deemed incompetent with charges dismissed and released to the community, there is a "lack of safety for victims as well as the perpetrators."

At the Fairbanks Roundtable, there was consensus that no-contact orders are not consistently enforced by the Department of Corrections (DOC). Some victims report unwanted contact from inmates; the DOC does not track three-way calling that can result in unwanted contact; and victims with no-contact orders are sometimes allowed to visit their offender in prison. The lack of consistency in monitoring inmate telephone calls can also contribute to victim/witness intimidation.

Victims are not always notified by the DOC when an inmate is moved to a halfway house or put on electronic monitoring in the community and this "can be very terrifying" for victims. If victims are unaware of the DOC's Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE) program or have not kept their contact information up-to-date, they do not receive notification of the status and/or release of their offender.

The Alaska Department of Corrections should improve its capacity to monitor inmate communications (including telephone calls and visits) to prevent unwanted offender contact with victims and violation of no-contact orders.

## **Parole and Reentry**

The Parole Board has the capacity to require and enforce conditions of supervision that are often stronger than those provided by courts, including conditions related to victim safety. Effective parole supervision is dependent on the parole officer and his/her training; when the offender is viewed as the only "client," it can pose difficulty for victims who are advocating for their rights, including reasonable protection and safety. During the parole and reentry phase of the criminal justice system, crime victims should also be considered clients; educated about their role and rights; and included in case planning.

victims' rights, safety and services) lack language access. In addition, there is no emergency telephone number in any language other than English. Efforts should be undertaken in Alaska to improve language accessibility in all criminal justice communications and documents.

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### **Other Issues**

There is a significant lack of resources for Alaska crime victims other than survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, i.e., victims of homicide, serious assault, robbery, child abuse, drunk driving, trafficking and property crimes.

Concerns were expressed about how the Victims of Crime Compensation Board determines who has access to victim funds. Many marginalized victims have been denied access to these funds due to behavior that the Board didn't like, or because they received funds for a prior victimization.

There is a significant need for expert witnesses who can testify on behalf of the prosecution in criminal cases (currently, lack of funding is the main barrier to greater use of expert witnesses).

Campuses of higher education in Alaska need to develop the infrastructure to support Title IX compliance with Federal law (this work is currently underway, and Pew Consultant Anne Seymour is following-up on this issue with referrals and resources).