

TESTIMONY DELIVERED TO THE STATE HOUSE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
JANUARY 23, 2020
JONATHAN PISTOTNIK
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA
RE: SUPPORT FOR HB 187

Good Afternoon, for the record my name is Jonathan Pistotnik. I am a resident of Anchorage. Although I have many partners in the community that I believe share some of my sentiments I am just speaking for myself this afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

I am stating my support for HB 187.

As someone that helps support prisoner reentry into the community on a full-time basis as the coordinator for the Anchorage reentry coalition, I believe that the sending of inmates out of state to private prisons will be detrimental.

Detrimental to those individuals sent out of state to be further isolated and removed from their homes and culture; detrimental to the families of the individuals sent out of state, to the wives and children and parents; and detrimental to those of us engaged in prisoner reentry work throughout Alaska and the communities that will bear the burden of rehabilitation.

I support this house bill and it's efforts to keep state inmates in Alaska.

Although I have many concerns about the states intent to send more than 500 Alaskans out of state I would like to make just 2 brief points.

Although I am mainly engaged in community organizing around the topic of prisoner reentry, I do go into correctional institutions, when I can, to educate inmates about reentry programs and services that are available in the community, and in doing so I hope to motivate and encourage them to seek out services that they may need when they are released and to answer questions to the best of my ability.

Education, awareness, motivation, encouragement, the building trust in those short visits I am afforded are key to my work and that of my partners in the community that make similar efforts to engage with inmates prior to their release.

Drawing upon my background in public health I believe that it takes time to build that trust and knowledge necessary to make real change in this context. So how will those of us engaging in and promoting reentry be able to meaningfully engage with someone that is housed in a prison thousands of miles away in Arizona or Colorado for 5, 10 years?

I can't help but think that it will be a serious step backwards for those of us in the community that are engaged in this work if men are sent out of state with no opportunity to hear our messaging.

The second concern that I have is the exposure to prison gang culture that is likely to occur when Alaskan inmates are sent to facilities that are warehousing inmates from other states.

I have never been privy to a discussion or meeting amongst my reentry partners in Anchorage in which gang affiliation has ever been a practical concern of ours when working with someone that has been released from incarceration.

The only time it comes up is when there is reflection on the last time inmates were sent outside and how it bolstered the small-time cliques that were here.

This is because prison gang culture and street gang culture does not exist in Alaska in the same way it does in the lower 48. In the parlance of the streets, it just isn't as hardcore in Alaska or in Anchorage.

My concern is that if men are sent out of state and warehoused in private prisons where they will be exposed to prison and street gang cultures, and either learn or be forced to adopt that type of lifestyle, when they return (and they will return) they will bring that gang culture back with them.

And as we know 95% of inmates are eventually released so my concern is that gang culture will eventually permeate into the community, and very simply make everyone less safe.

In closing I want to reiterate my support for HB 187 and any efforts that the legislature proposes, or DOC for that matter, to keep Alaskans in Alaska.

Thank you.