

February 15, 2021

Dear Senator Elvi Grey-Jackson,

The summer of 2020 was one for the history books. Not only was the world rocked by a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, but we also saw a massive uprising in the United States against police violence and brutality. The George Floyd and Breonna Taylor uprising shook society to its core and highlighted contradictions that can no longer be overlooked or ignored. The truth is, is that the United States is a republic built on the violent exploitation of Black and Indigenous Americans. This country must have a difficult conversation with itself and begin to implement change. Alaska is no exception.

There is serious mistrust between the community and police. Not only is this a national problem, it is a local one as well. Public safety is more than just a low body count, or death toll. It is transparency and accountability. It is the government, developing and implementing policies that are necessary to facilitate public trust and confidence in law enforcement. It's more than coffee with a cop, a ride-along, or a public relations campaign that tells Alaskans what an excellent job the police are doing. It is having difficult conversations, acknowledging past wrongs, and striving for improvement. That is why we support Sen. Elvi Gray-Jackson's (Anchorage) proposed public safety policy changes.

Alaska Senate bills (SB) 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 46 are vital and necessary if Alaska is going to build public trust and confidence in law enforcement. For example, SB 1 would regulate the use of chokeholds, SB 2 would require that law enforcement deescalate volatile situations before using deadly force, and SB 46 would establish a statewide use-of-force database. Transparency and accountability are public safety choices and Alaska must adopt a modern approach to public safety. The state is woefully behind. Not only will this protect the public, but it also protects law enforcement. These bills create a dynamic in which the public and law enforcement are partners in public safety, not adversaries. For this environment to be established it requires trust and as of today, the state of Alaska does not have the requisite policies to begin this long and difficult process.

We are calling on the 32nd Alaska Legislature to pass these bills and for Gov. Mike Dunleavy to sign them into law. As every Alaskan knows, the state is facing an unprecedented social and economic crisis. Public safety changes of this nature are not secondary and are equally important as we rebuild Alaska. Public safety is critical infrastructure, and these bills should be considered as such.

In 2020, Anchorage experienced three police-involved shootings, which resulted in the deaths of Anchorage residents. These shootings have left many questions unanswered and due to the lack of policy has further increased the distrust in police. Distrust in law enforcement leaves communities vulnerable and unsafe. It makes law enforcement less effective and puts police officers in danger. The policies being proposed today will not fix this problem overnight, but they are a step in the right direction. The consequence of not modernizing Alaska's public safety, by not implementing more robust transparency and accountability policies runs the risk of putting communities in danger of what occurred in the summer of 2020. It can take only one person who is in a position of power to do the wrong thing, to ignite an explosion on par with the uprising in Minneapolis.

We now have the opportunity to do the hard work, have the difficult conversations, and build a more just Alaska. This is not a partisan issue, this is a public safety issue, and public safety is a human right.

While we support these public safety policy changes, we recognize that is just one step in a long march toward justice. Justice is multifaceted and requires a multitude of actors that sometimes work together in harmony and at other times in conflict. We hope that is a time of harmony and we can overcome our differences and find common ground to solve a fundamental contradiction.

We call on all Alaskans to support these bills and join the march for justice.

Sincerely,

Michael Patterson

Cynthia Gachupin

Austin Reynolds

Eryn MacKenzie