

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

SENATOR DONALD C. OLSON



ALASKA STATE CAPITOL, SUITE 514
JUNEAU, ALASKA, 99801-1182
(907) 465-3707

Sponsor Statement Senate Bill 81 version I

“An Act requiring background investigations of village public safety officer applicants by the Department of Public Safety; relating to the village public safety officers program; and providing for an effective date.”

This bill implements nine recommendations of the joint legislative VPSO Working Group’s 2020 report. Created in the late 1970’s, the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program’s stated purpose is to assist in the protection of “life and property” and coordinate probation and parole in rural communities.

Currently ten entities operate VPSO grants. Eight of the ten grantees are regionally based nonprofit corporations whose missions are to cultivate self-determination among local tribal citizens. One is a federally recognized tribe, and the Northwest Arctic Borough, a home rule regional government seated in Kotzebue, is the only grantee organization that is a municipal government.

While the VPSO program has provided valuable service to participating areas, the past decade has seen shrinking numbers of VPSOs, significant difficulty in recruitment and retention of officers, and community needs that surpass the current duties of VPSOs. There is undoubtedly a need to address the crisis in public safety infrastructure and service in rural Alaska.

On May 9th, 2019, Senate President Cathy Giessel and House Speaker Bryce Edgmon announced the creation of a Joint House/Senate Working Group to provide substantive policy recommendations related to the VPSO program. Appointed to the working group were: Senator Donny Olson, Co-Chair; Representative Chuck Kopp, Co-Chair; Senator Click Bishop; Senator Mike Shower; Representative Bryce Edgmon; and Representative George Rauscher.

The working group was assigned to coordinate with stakeholders to examine the underlying causes of the recruitment and retention obstacle and provide proposals to turn around the epidemic rate of personnel turnover within the VPSO program.

The working group held meetings, attended community meetings, participated in listening sessions, and worked with stakeholders to arrive at the proposals outlined in this report. The proposals primarily address the core problem of increasing the number of VPSO’s available to communities.

Version *I* incorporates the eight of the nine Working Group’s short term recommendations.

Staff Contact: Brix Hahn
Brix.Hahn@akleg.gov
(907) 465-3877

32-LS0362\I