



VILLAGE PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS:

*Public Safety in Rural
Alaska*



**Alaska Legislature Lunch &
Learn**

March 12, 2026



Presenters



*Chris Hatch, RPSO
Northwest Arctic Borough*



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Northwest Arctic Borough*



*Jason Wilson, VPSO Coordinator
Tlingit & Haida*



How VPSOs Strengthen Alaska



VPSO Overview

- Created to reduce emergency response times in remote Alaska communities.
- Ensures a consistent public safety presence in rural areas.
- VPSOs work with Alaska State Troopers and regional partners to provide essential protection.
- Many VPSOs serve in their own communities, building trust and culturally grounded emergency response.





About VPSOs

Mission

VPSOs partnering with rural Alaskans to improve safety and quality of life.

Vision

Public Safety through Public Service.

CORE VALUES

- Professionalism
- Loyalty
- Integrity
- Self-Discipline
- Officer Safety
- Attention to Detail
- Sense of Urgency
- Courage
- Commitment to Public Safety



Shared Mission

Across Alaska, VPSO programs share a common mission. More importantly, VPSOs are often the first and only responders in rural Alaska. Their presence saves lives, protects communities, and strengthens public safety across the state.





Understanding Alaska's Rural Public Safety Roles

ACRONYM	ROLE	COVERAGE FOCUS
VPSO	Village Public Safety Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• State -authorized program• Provides law enforcement services and emergency response• Duties defined in Alaska statute
TPO	Tribal Police Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employed by tribal governments• Provide public safety services within tribal communities
VPO	Village Police Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employed by local governments• Training and authority vary by community (often much less training)



Regional Public Safety Officers

In 2024 the State of Alaska Department of Public Safety established RPSOs. RPSOs supplement and support local VPSOs by responding to larger or complex incidents, offering training and oversight, and helping ensure consistent public safety coverage in rural Alaska.



John Pleasant
Assoc. of Village
Council Presidents



Wassillie Gilila
Assoc. of Village
Council Presidents



Craig Maines
Bristol Bay Native
Association



Souchoy Saepanh
Copper River Native
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John Peratrovich
Copper River Native
Association



Zach West
Tlingit &
Haida



**Sean
Ahshapanek**
Tlingit & Haida



Nate Becker
Tanana Chiefs
Conference



VPSO Program Coordinators

Program Coordinators manage and support the VPSO program on behalf of the tribal organization that administers it. Coordinators serve as the main liaison between the tribal organization and Alaska Department of Public Safety, oversee hiring and retention of VPSOs, and coordinate training and operations.



Michael Nemeth
*Aleutian Pribilof
Island Association*



Shawn Kamkahpak
*Assoc. of Village
Council Presidents*



Craig Maines
*Bristol Bay Native
Association*



Leonard Wallner
Chugachmiut



David Attebury
*Tanana Chiefs
Conference*



Cecil Sanford
*Copper River
Native Association*



Gina Appolloni
Kawerak



Tim Brady
*Kodiak Area Native
Association*



Darrell Hildebrand
*Northwest Arctic
Borough*



Jason Wilson
Tlingit & Haida



Why the VPSO Program Matters

ELDER BASIC ASSISTANCE

FIRE

FIGHTER

COUNSELOR

FIRST RESPONDERS

LAST FRONTIER

PARAMEDIC

UTILITY WORKER

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INSTRUCTORS

EMS

YOUTH

ADVOCATE

FIREFIGHTER

VILLAGE PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICER

LAW ENFORCER

LIFE SAVER

EQUIPMENT

OPERATOR

SUPERHERO

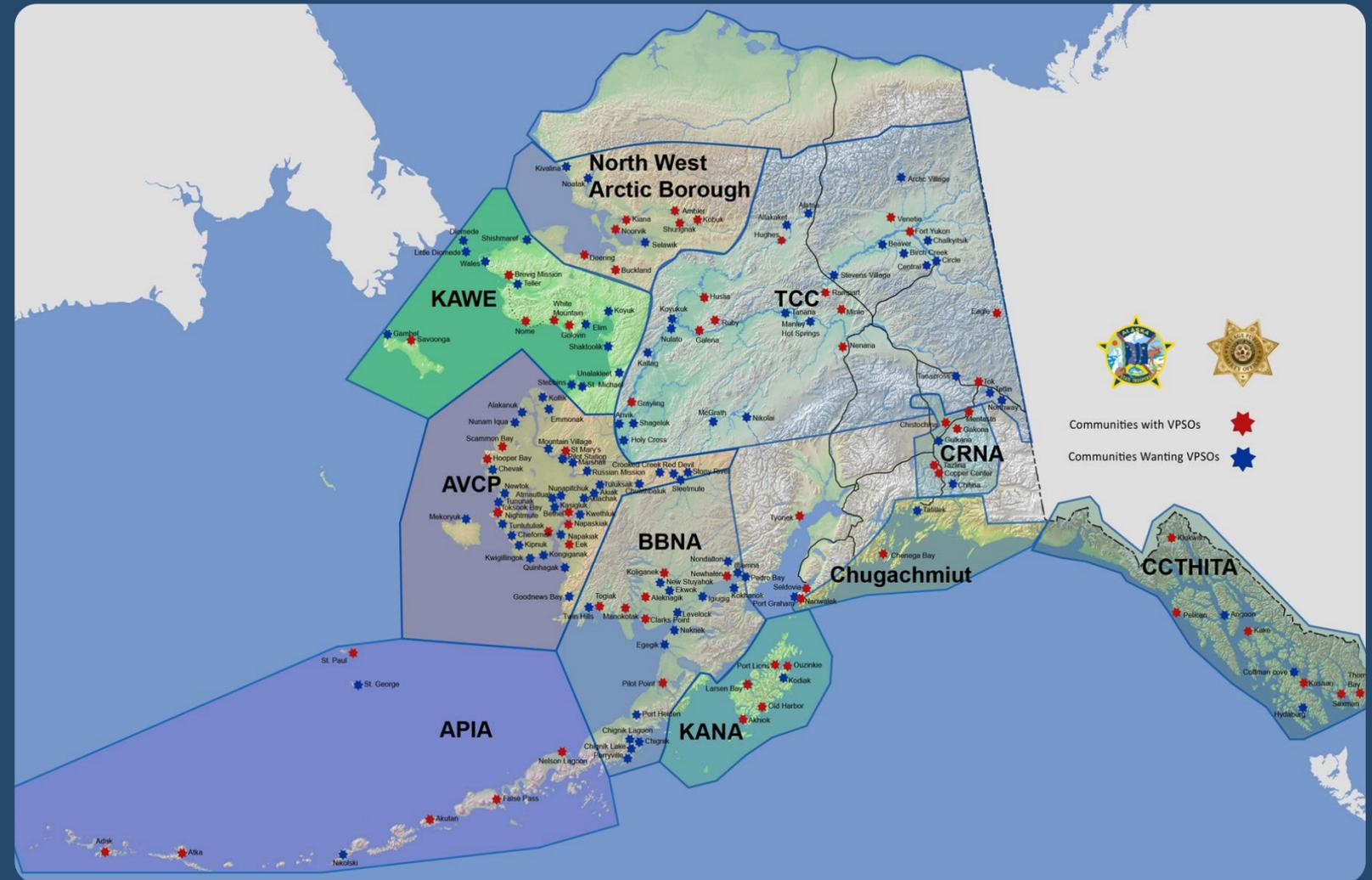
SEARCH & RESCUE

AMBULANCE DRIVER



VPSOs Fill the Gap

- Many rural Alaska communities have no local police.
- Alaska State Troopers may be hundreds of miles away.
- Weather and travel often delay emergency response.
- VPSOs serve 28,000+ rural Alaskans in remote communities.
- One VPSO may cover multiple communities not connected by roads.





By the Numbers

	Villages Served	People Served	VPSOs Serving
Aleutian Pribiloff Islands Assoc.	4	3,400	11
Assoc. of Village Council Presidents	7	4,600	11
Bristol Bay Native Association	24	3,830	8
Chugachmiut	4	410	1
Copper River Native Assoc.	6	1,888	8
Kawerak	15	6,80	4
Kodiak Area Native Assoc.	6	619	8
Northwest Arctic Borough	11	7,703	12
Tanana Chiefs Conference	42	=10,000	13
Tlingit & Haida	9	2,420	9



Why It Matters

In a rural village, a VPSO may respond to a domestic disturbance, treat an injured person as an EMT, coordinate a medevac flight and later assist with a search and rescue — all in the same day.

In February 2026, the Northwest Arctic Borough recognized two outstanding Village Safety Public Officers for their dedication and service to our communities.

- RPSO of the Year: Joshua Harville
- VPSO of the Year: James Kvamme





Recruitment and Retention Challenges

Candidates applying to become a VPSO must complete a formal application, pass a background investigation and meet suitability standards for public safety service. Background checks typically include a review of criminal history, verification of employment history and reference checks.

Challenges

- Recruiting officers to remote villages.
- Housing shortages.
- Training pipeline.
- Retention challenges.





Reflecting the Community Served

The new VPSO vehicle wraps for the Tlingit & Haida program reflect the identity and pride of the communities served in Southeast. The Department of Public Safety Commissioner recognizes that public safety is strengthened when those serving a community also reflect and respect it. By incorporating cultural design elements into the Southeast VPSO program vehicles, the wraps help ensure officers are visible, approachable, and connected to the people and traditions of the region. Building trust with residents.





Statutory Authority

The VPSO Program is established in Alaska statute.

- AS 18.65.670 establishes the Village Public Safety Officer Program
- AS 18.65.672 defines the duties of Village Public Safety Officers

Duties include:

- Law enforcement services
- Response to criminal and public safety incidents
- Search and rescue
- Fire protection and fire prevention
- Emergency medical assistance



Recruitment and Background Investigation

Candidates applying to become VPSOs must:

- Complete a formal application process
- Pass a background investigation
- Meet suitability standards for public safety service

Background investigations may include:

- Criminal history review
- Employment history verification
- Reference checks



VPSO Training

Training pathways may include:

- VPSO Academy
- Alaska Law Enforcement Training (ALET)
- Or other equivalent Law enforcement academies

Training areas include:

- Criminal law and law enforcement procedures
- Emergency Trauma Technician / EMS training
- Fire protection and fire prevention
- Search and rescue operations



Field Training and Assignment

After academy training, officers complete:

- Field Training and Evaluation (FTEP)

This includes:

- Mentored field training
- Practical application of academy instruction
- Assignment to a rural community



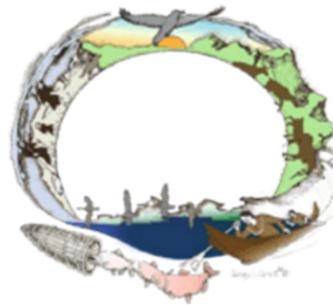
VPSO Equipment

The Northwest Arctic Borough is the first Alaska region in recent years to equip its Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs) with firearms.

Armed VPSO programs require officers to complete certified training, pass psychological evaluations, and receive approval from regional non-profit employers. Other regions are evaluating or launching pilot programs, reflecting a growing trend toward allowing VPSOs to carry sidearms to enhance safety.



VPSO Programs





THANK YOU

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