



Recommendations to Reduce the Overrepresentation of Alaska Native People in the Criminal Justice System



Meet the Team

The following organizations and individuals partnered in the research for, and creation of, this report. We express our gratitude to this team, as well as to the many individuals doing amazing work each day in their fields of mental health, cultural programs, substance use treatment, housing, youth programs and initiatives, reentry, workforce development, public safety, criminal justice, tribal courts and other tribal programs, and many more.

Department of Corrections

Alaska Federation of Natives

University of Alaska Fairbanks - Center for Alaska Native Health Research

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Background

Alaska Native people experience disproportionately high rates of incarceration, reflecting deep systemic inequalities. Although Alaska Native people make up roughly 14–19% of Alaska’s population, they represent 44% of those incarcerated in state prisons.

These disparities begin long before justice system involvement and include historical trauma, inadequate access to culturally appropriate health and behavioral health services, and social and economic marginalization.

The disparities do not abate within the criminal justice system. In 2023, Alaska Native people represented 29% of those on pre-trial supervision, 42% of inmates, and 39% of those on probation/parole.





Background

Current Context in Alaska

Approximately 17 of every 1,000 Alaskan adults were in the care or custody of the Department of Corrections (DOC) in 2024 (Alaska Department of Corrections, 2025).

Alaska's overall recidivism rate has declined over the past decade, but Alaska Native people continue to have the highest recidivism rate (60%) of monitored races/ethnicities (Alaska Department of Corrections, 2025), reinforcing intergenerational trauma, destabilizing families and communities, and imposing high social and financial costs on the state.

The majority of individuals who returned to prison (62%) were reincarcerated due to probation/parole violations (Alaska Department of Corrections, 2025).





Background

Reducing these disparities is not only a matter of justice and cost effectiveness – it is a pathway to healthier, safer, and more resilient communities throughout Alaska.

In 2024, the Alaska Legislature passed an omnibus crime bill, House Bill 66, which included a directive to the Department of Corrections to conduct a study with an Alaska Native organization to better understand why the Alaska Native incarceration and recidivism rates are so high, and to create recommendations to reduce both initial encounters with the prison system and recidivism rates.

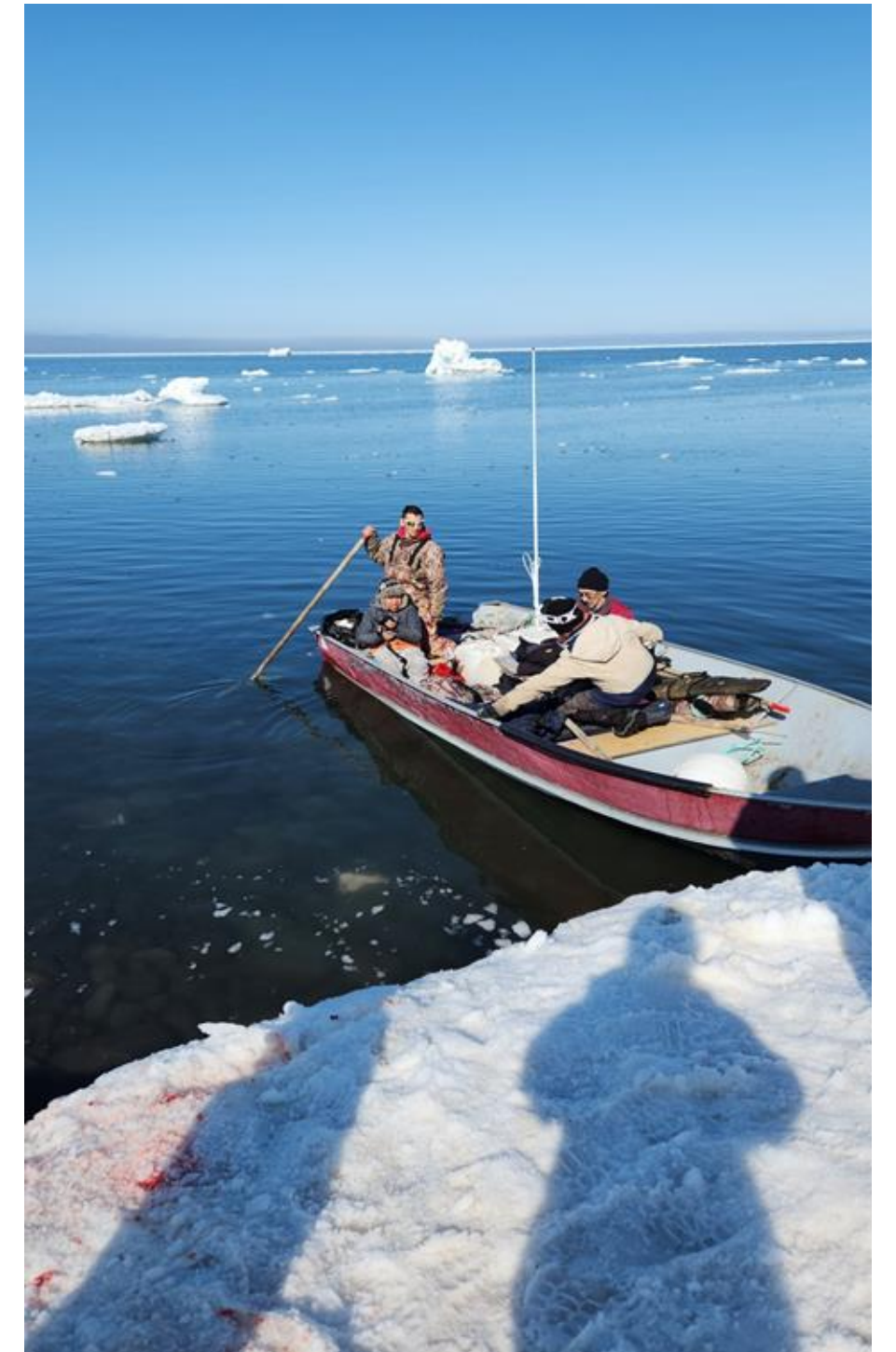




Background

House Bill 66 identified eight areas for the study:

- (1) establish restorative justice programs to address the unique cultural needs of Alaska Native people;
- (2) intervene earlier with at-risk Alaska Native youth and young adults to ensure those at-risk youth and young adults have the life skills and support systems necessary to prevent encounters with the criminal justice system;
- (3) reduce the Alaska Native prison population by providing early mental health diagnosis and better treatment;
- (4) provide low-income housing options to reduce the Alaska Native homeless population that are more likely to encounter law enforcement when living on the street;
- (5) improve alcohol and drug misuse treatment options for Alaska Native youth and young adults;
- (6) provide job training and mentoring opportunities to earn a living and provide food, housing, and other family necessities for Alaska Native residents and families;
- (7) offer digital training to Alaska Native residents to access tribal, state, and federal services, obtain digital employment, participate in remote counseling services to address alcohol and drug abuse, and participate in job training and education; and
- (8) identify federal grant programs at the United States Department of Justice, the United States Department of Health and Human Services, including the Indian Health Service and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the United States Department of the Interior, the United States Department of Labor, and other federal agencies that could be used to fund implementation of the recommendations, with a particular emphasis on juveniles and young adults.





Background

Ongoing impacts of colonization have resulted in high rates of poverty, trauma, homelessness, substance abuse, and other challenges that are correlated with a greater vulnerability to incarceration and recidivism.

Disproportionate incarceration and recidivism are rooted in systemic factors like intergenerational trauma, poverty, housing insecurity, adverse childhood experiences, limited access to mental health care, and lack of culturally aligned services. “Alaska Native people are more likely than any other racial or ethnic group in Alaska to be the victim of a crime” which is associated with later involvement in the justice system (Alaska Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2002).

Experts interviewed for this study emphasized that prevention efforts that are more effective include those that begin in the prenatal and early childhood environment, as well as offerings that support cultural identity, stabilize housing, and address mental health and substance misuse through community-based and Alaska Native–led approaches.





Key Takeaways

- Disproportionate incarceration and recidivism is driven by structural and systemic factors.
- Mental health, housing stability, and early youth intervention consistently show the strongest evidence for reducing incarceration and recidivism.
- Early childhood interventions tend to have the greatest impact, including prenatal care (including prevention of FASD), parent training programs, and free or reduced-cost culturally relevant childcare.
- Make probation and parole conditions achievable.
- Telehealth, online job training, and remote fulfillment of probation/parole requirements
- Providing substance misuse treatment to people while incarcerated has high returns on investment.
- Augmenting Tribal Court systems promotes community protective factors while potentially decreasing costs for the state.
- Provide career pathways for Alaska Native people to enter the justice system workforce (i.e. lawyers, judges).





Key Take Aways From Expert Interviews

Tribal Courts & Restorative Justice

- Tribal Courts positively address intergenerational trauma, increase tribal sovereignty, support community-driven solutions, and keep people in their communities.
- Lack of capacity and state support limits full implementation.

Early Interventions with Youth

- Encouraging meaningful youth-Elder connections and cultural identity support.
- Lack of mental health interventions, especially in rural areas.

Mental Health

- Support connection with Alaska Native identity and culture..
- Address and rebuild relationships with Alaska Native communities affected by generational trauma.
- Provide mental health services for youth and allow youth to connect with Elders to strengthen identity and Alaska Native ways of life.

Housing & Reentry

- Low-barrier, Housing First approaches crucial; housing insecurity drives recidivism.
- Reentry services should integrate housing, employment, education, and healthcare support.

Substance Misuse Treatment

- Reduce wait times for services and increase the substance misuse treatment workforce.
- Expand Tribal substance misuse treatment resources, including inpatient centers, and continue funding culturally-responsive programming.
- Address housing, early childhood experiences, and mental health to better support those seeking treatment.

Workforce Education & Mentorship

- Increase Alaska Native representation in the criminal justice workforce, and address barriers for Alaska Native youth entering justice careers (education, remote access).
- Provide Alaska Native cultural trainings for justice system staff.

Other Key Insights

- Parole/probation conditions must be feasible to reduce recidivism - could be satisfied remotely from within home communities to reduce homelessness and recidivism.
- Develop a task force to develop comprehensive, culturally grounded solutions.



Thank You • Mahsi' choo • Quyana • Chin'an • Gunalchéesh • Taikuu • Háw'aa • N'toyxsm • Qagaliqux • Tsin'aen • Enaa Baasee'



A huge thank you to the project team for their leadership and contributions to this work. We are grateful to the community members who participated in listening sessions, interviews, surveys, and reached out to us to share their experiences, insights, and ideas. We also acknowledge the DOC for providing data and support, the UAA and UAF teams for their research collaboration, and the Advisory Team for their time, knowledge, and guidance. This study was a true community approach to identifying solutions.

We look forward to continued collaboration to implement the report's recommendations and advance meaningful action.