



Department of
Family and Community Services
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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February 2, 2024

The Honorable Mike Prax
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol Room 108
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Prax,

On January 23, 2024, the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS) provided a department overview to the House Health and Social Services Committee. During the hearing the department received questions that required additional follow-up.

1. Can you provide more information on the Brain Injury project at the Division of Juvenile Justice?

The Division of Juvenile Justice, in partnership with the Department of Public Health- Division of Public Health and the Southeast Regional Resource Center, has implemented a screening tool to identify youth experiencing a traumatic brain injury (TBI). These types of brain injuries are diverse and may include medical conditions such as a stroke or infection, or external forces like an assault, fall, or motor vehicle accident.

Brain injury among justice-involved youth is associated with impulse control, substance misuse, violent behavior, mental health problems, increased frequency of misconduct in juvenile justice facilities, and higher recidivism rates (source: [Brain Injury Association of America](#)).

During the initial roll out of the screening in Fairbanks and Bethel (February to October 2023) 22% of the 45-youth screened were identified as experiencing ongoing symptoms of a brain injury. Under the screening tool program, youth identified for potential symptoms are provided specialized supports and referred for individualized services. Moving forward, the division plans to implement this screening state-wide.

2. Does the Tiger Connect secure information sharing application connect to the electronic health records being implemented at the Alaska Pioneer Homes and Alaska Psychiatric Institute?

At this time the systems are not able to be integrated, but users are able to share confidential case information via Tiger Connect with department employees and providers who do not have access to the electronic health record. The department will continue to look for ways to integrate our systems to support data and workflow.

3. Are you seeing job candidates who have barrier crimes which prevent them from working for the Department of Family and Community Services?

The staff of the Alaska Pioneer Homes (APH) and Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) are among the individuals and entities subject to the employee background checks administered by the Department of Health (DOH), Division of Health Care Services under [AS 47.05.300](#). The standards for determining whether a person is eligible for employment or service are set in regulation under [7 AAC 10.905](#). These standards are commonly referred to as “barrier crimes.” The program offers individuals the opportunity to seek a variance when a barrier has been identified.

In FY23, the Department had 643 candidates at API and APH who had background checks completed under the DOH background check program. Of those, 8 candidates were found to have a barrier crime. Of the 8 candidates with an identified barrier to employment, 1 candidate applied for and received a variance.

The Office of Children’s Services and Division of Juvenile Justice employees are not part of the DOH background check program. The Department conducts employee background checks in cooperation with the Department of Public Safety as authorized by [AS 12.62.160](#).

More information on the DOH background check program can be found here:
<https://health.alaska.gov/dhcs/pages/cl/bgcheck/default.aspx>

4. Has the Division of Juvenile Justice considered a “peer support” model, such as what the Department of Health, Division of Behavioral Health is doing?

The Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) does not participate in the Division of Behavioral Health peer support program for staff; however the division has added peer support as a part of new employee onboarding. The division also has developed a wellness committee focused on wellness and positive culture for all employees. In addition, the division has added an electronic wellness application, CORDICO, that provides 24/7 support tools to all staff as well as their family members. CORDICO supports healthy habits in many areas including emotional health, nutrition, sleep, and more.

DJJ prioritizes building positive peer supports and enhancing community engagement for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Building and promoting peer support is a pillar of the TIERs (Trauma Informed, Effective Reinforcement) curriculum utilized in the division's facilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of Family and Community Services update to the committee. If you have any further questions, please contact the DFCS Legislative Liaison Matt Davidson at (907)465-5808.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "K. Kovol".

Kim Kovol
Commissioner