

Alaska Public Defender Agency (PDA):

- **Primary Focus:**
 - Provides legal representation to indigent individuals accused of crimes. This is their core function, fulfilling the constitutional right to counsel.
 - They handle a broad spectrum of criminal cases, from misdemeanors to felonies.
- **Key Characteristics:**
 - It's the primary provider of public defense in Alaska.
 - Caseloads can be very high.
 - Conflicts of interest can arise, leading to cases being referred to OPA.

Alaska Office of Public Advocacy (OPA):

- **Broader Scope:**
 - While OPA does provide criminal defense, particularly in cases where the PDA has a conflict, its mandate extends beyond that.
 - OPA provides legal advocacy and guardianship services to vulnerable Alaskans, including:
 - Representing abused and neglected children in protective proceedings.
 - Providing public guardianship for incapacitated adults.
 - Providing representation to parents in child in need of aid cases.
 - They take on a disproportional amount of complex felony cases.
- **Key Characteristics:**
 - It serves a wider range of vulnerable populations.
 - It steps in to provide criminal defense when the PDA has conflicts.
 - Has a large roll in civil cases, involving vulnerable people.
- **Overlap:**
 - Both provide legal representation to indigent individuals.
 - Both are involved in ensuring access to justice.
- **Differences:**
 - PDA's primary focus is criminal defense; OPA's is broader, encompassing advocacy for various vulnerable populations.
 - OPA handles conflict cases from the PDA, and also handles many civil cases.
 - OPA has a very large roll in child protection cases, and adult guardianship.
- **Selection Process:**
 - Alaska Judicial Council vets and nominates two candidates for the Public Defender
 - The Governor must choose from the vetted nominees.
 - The Public Defender serves a 4-year term.
 - If the Governor chooses to retain the PD, nominations put forth by AJC are not required, but they must be approved by a majority of the legislature.
 - Both Public Defender and the Public Advocate require strong legal credentials.
 - The Public Advocate does not undergo a nomination or vetting process.
 - The Public Advocate serves at the pleasure of the Commissioner and can be fired at any time.

