



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of Administration

VIOLENT CRIMES COMPENSATION BOARD

PO Box 110230
Juneau, Alaska 99811
Main: 800.764.3040
Fax: 907.465.2379
www.doa.alaska.gov/vccb
doa.vccb@alaska.gov

April 7, 2016

Senator Coghill
Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Coghill

RE: Senate Bill 91

As a victim advocacy entity some may find it surprising that the Violent Crimes Compensation Board would support this crime bill, a major element of which promotes reduced jail time for criminal offenders.

Here's why the Board does support this bill.

Alaska's prison population has been growing fast. In 1994 the incarceration rate was 293 inmates per 100,000 residents; in 2015 it was 690 inmates per 100,000 residents. Recidivism is at 64%. Based on those statistics alone it is fair to conclude that locking people up is not acting as a deterrent to crime. Moreover, 64% of Alaska inmates are non-violent offenders. The Board does not agree with releasing violent offenders early – a violent crime should be met with an appropriate sentence that protects the victimized individual and the community from the violent offender. But it doesn't appear to be helping anyone to keep non-violent offenders locked up for extended periods of time, time during which they are likely learning anti-social behaviors and ways of coping with their stressful circumstances, which will not serve them or society at large favorably when they are eventually released.

Moreover, my experience of being on this Board means I can't overlook the fact that victimization, addiction and criminal activity are inextricably linked. As an advocacy group, one of our major goals is to promote the healing of crime victims and help them to not fall prey to victimization again. And we want to prevent the vicious cycle that we have unfortunately seen time and again where a young victim of crime, particularly sexual abuse, goes on themselves to become a predator and perpetrator of abuse. Incarceration on its own has not been effective in cutting into that cycle, or impacting an individual's behavior.

The reinvestment provisions of this bill are vitally important. Funding more treatment programs; funding violence prevention programs; providing direct services to victims; funding

re-entry programs to help people coming out of the corrections system to find gainful employment and housing and escape the lifestyle they were in previously. These are all types of reinvestment that have been demonstrated by experience in other states as having a positive impact on recidivism rates.

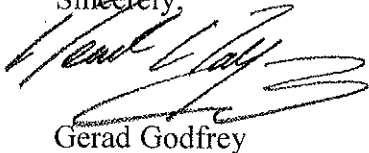
Evidence from other states such as South Carolina and Colorado supports the underlying philosophy of this bill, that certain practices and policies can reduce recidivism including:

- Using risk and needs assessments to inform case management, sorting individuals based on their assessed risk levels in a consistent manner, tailoring interventions and prioritizing resources for those at highest risk of reoffending.
- Improved community supervision, informed by an individual's risk level, to provide greater support and access to services, with parole and probation officers given a range of options for swift and certain sanctions and incentives that are proportionate to the event and appropriate to the individual under supervision.
- Investing in community based treatment such as Alaska's Alcohol Safety Action Program – so much crime is linked to drug and alcohol abuse and addiction. An increased emphasis on supported sobriety can help see an impact on criminal activity.

At the same time, the Board is very cognizant of the constitutional rights of victims and wants to ensure that crime victims are heard in this process. The Board was invited to participate and did indeed participate in the victim round table discussion that informed the Alaska Criminal Justice Commission recommendations. The Board believes that victims must continue to have the opportunity to give their input into release conditions, sentencing and should also have the same ability to provide input into the initial risk assessment of an individual.

Finally, the lengthy pendency of criminal cases is an area which must also be addressed. Crime victims and their families can endure further trauma and suffering as they see court date after court date delayed due to motion practice, scheduling conflicts or simple casework overload on the part of public defenders and the court system. This is an area where crime victims feel most let down by "the system", and as the Commission's recommendations make clear, the length of pre-trial incarceration is contributing significantly to overall costs. Without rushing to trial, a more streamlined process would benefit everyone involved.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gerard Godfrey", written over a horizontal line.

Gerard Godfrey

Chairman

Violent Crimes Compensation Board



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Capitol Building, Room 204
Juneau, AK 99801

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Gerard Godfrey

Chairman

Violent Crimes Compensation Board