

# Alaska Regional Coalition

*Representing 100 Communities*

October 27, 2017

**Subject: Pass a “clean” SB54 with limited amendments; provide resources for public safety, treatment, and reentry**

Dear Senate President Pete Kelly, Speaker of the House Bryce Edgmon, and Honorable Members of the Alaska State Legislature:

As the legislature deliberates the various components found in SB54 and revisits the genesis and justification for SB91, we encourage you to exercise restraint as it relates to approving sweeping changes to criminal justice reform. In short, The Alaska Regional Coalition urges you to pass a “clean” SB54 with limited amendments. We also call on you to fund the treatment and reentry portions of SB91 so that positive change can happen in our state and our communities. Further, we hope you will seek ways to provide adequate resources for public safety, behavioral health, and the state's legal and correctional systems that hold people accountable for their actions.

SB91 has only been law for a little over one year; indeed, some elements have not even been put into effect. Yet SB91 unjustly bears the brunt of public frustration about the recent uptick in crime. This is not to minimize the righteous fear and anger of victims. There are other obvious significant factors at play in our communities, not least of which are a statewide economic recession and a surge in use of and addiction to prescription and illicit opioids.

To be clear, we believe that criminals should be held accountable for their actions. We believe jail time, probation, and parole are appropriate measures to ensure public safety and deliver unambiguous community condemnation of criminal activity. That said, SB91 encompasses a data-driven, scientifically-based comprehensive overhaul of a criminal justice system that aims to reduce recidivism and enhance rehabilitation, while also holding people accountable for their actions.

Each of our respective tribal entities, representing 100 Alaska Native communities, supported your efforts in recent years to come up with comprehensive criminal justice reform that included creative solutions that focus on accountability, treatment, anti-recidivism, and community work service, particularly in the face of a shrinking state budget. We cheered when SB91 was signed into law. However, Alaska was and still is in desperate need of criminal justice reform because the system was not producing acceptable outcomes. This remains true even after the passage of SB91. Our prisons are still overflowing (in direct contradiction to the falsely dubbed “catch and release” law) and millions of dollars are being spent warehousing our citizens.

We cannot afford to go back to the old status quo; it is not an option for us or our people. We need to double down on reform, with an eye on treatment of drug and alcohol addiction and reentry for our returning citizens. This was the missing piece from SB91 that was slow moving in the face of a rising crime rate and a growing opioid epidemic.

We also believe that the Criminal Justice Commission report and suggested amendments to SB91 by way of SB54 are appropriate and well thought out. We, as a Coalition, trust those experts to inform our path to reform.



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Again, The Alaska Regional Coalition urges you to pass SB54 with limited amendments. We also urge you to support the treatment and reentry portions of SB91 so that positive change can happen in our state.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your service to Alaska.

Respectfully,



Richard Peterson  
CCTHITA

Approved electronically on 10/26/17

Tim Gilbert  
Maniilaq Association



Melanie Bahnke  
Kawerak, Inc.



Victor Joseph  
Tanana Chiefs Conference

Approved electronically on 10/26/17

Jan Vanderpool  
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*The Alaska Regional Coalition is a consortium of five Native regional tribal nonprofits representing 65,000 Alaskans from Kotzebue to Ketchikan. We came together to ensure that lawmakers were provided with the information they need to make informed decisions about Alaska regional nonprofits and the 65,000 people we serve. ARC nonprofits – four regional nonprofits and one regional tribe – Tanana Chiefs Conference, Kawerak, Maniilaq, Chugachmiut, and Central Council Tlingit-Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska – are all recognized by the U.S. Indian Self-Determination Act to provide medical, behavioral, social, public safety, workforce development and judicial supports to the State of Alaska through contracts and grants. We represent 100 Tribes and we provide services to everybody in our communities, not solely Alaska Natives.*



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