

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 16, 2001  
8:00 a.m.

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

OVERVIEW: DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

**TAPES**

01-2, SIDES A & B

**CALL TO ORDER**

REPRESENTATIVE JOHN COGHILL, Chair, convened the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 8:00 a.m.

**PRESENT**

Committee members present were Representatives Coghill, James, Crawford, Fate, Hayes, Stevens, and Wilson.

**SUMMARY OF INFORMATION**

GLENN G. GODFREY, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety, introduced people who attended the meeting with him. They included Col. Joel Hard, Division of Fish and Wildlife Protection; Col. Randy Crawford, Division of State Troopers; Gary Powell, State Fire Marshal and Director, Division of Fire Prevention; Kenneth Bischoff, Director, Division of Administrative Services; Royce Weller, Special Assistant to the Commissioner; and Lt. Steve Dunnagan, legislative liaison for the Division of Alaska State Troopers.

COMMISSIONER GODFREY gave a thumbnail sketch of the Department of Public Safety. He said there currently are 86 officers enforcing fish and game laws statewide. In addition, there are 12 to 13 United States Fish and Wildlife Service enforcement officers working out of Anchorage.

REPRESENTATIVE FATE asked about the role of the federal enforcement officers on state land.

COLONEL HARD said that federal officers become involved in arrests related to violations on state lands when suspected

violators leave the state before they have been charged. These cases usually involve commercial guiding issues, he added.

REPRESENTATIVE STEVENS asked what a reasonable level of staffing would be.

COLONEL HARD said that ten additional Division of Fish and Wildlife Protection officers ("brown shirts") would be a reasonable staffing level. He said the division receives about 300 telephone complaints and makes 50,000 field contacts in a year. He said 5 percent of those contacts result in a citation or arrest.

REPRESENTATIVE HAYES asked about the level of staffing for law enforcement.

COMMISSIONER GODFREY said the Division of Alaska State Troopers has 237 troopers ("blue shirts") in 324 posts statewide. He said the total number of blue shirts and brown shirts is down by 100 positions since "pipeline days."

REPRESENTATIVE JAMES asked about recruitment.

COMMISSIONER GODFREY said it is difficult to find people to hire. He said that a recent increase in advertising has resulted in the Department of Public Safety receiving 1,400 applications. After background checks and interviews, 25 to 30 applicants will remain. He said that all troopers from the rank of first sergeant on up are not members of a union, but all other troopers a part of a collective bargaining unit. Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs) are not employees of public safety, but work on contract.

COMMISSIONER GODFREY said one of the reasons the department wants to bring back the constable program is that many of the VPSOs do not want to be transferred out of their villages. Unlike new troopers, who are almost sure of being transferred within five years, constables would not be required to leave, but would receive further training and more responsibilities with a pay range about two steps below a trooper. Commissioner Godfrey said when he was the lone trooper at the Northway post during the mid-1970s, he hired two of the first constables, one for Northway and one for Eagle. The Northway constable, James Gallen, is now the trooper in Northway, Gallen's home town.

REPRESENTATIVE JAMES said she believes Alaska just needs more troopers. She asked why the constable program was discontinued.

COMMISSIONER GODFREY said he thought it had been too successful for its own good. The constables were getting so good at the job that a question arose about the level of pay for work performed. He said it is his responsibility to delineate duties in a manner acceptable to the union.

COMMISSIONER GODFREY said he would like to propose a pilot program with eight constables. Constables not having to be transferred would be an incentive for some of the VPSOs to go through the extra training to become constables. He said there are pros and cons to troopers being assigned to their home towns. He said Trooper Gallen has done very well in Northway. Commissioner Godfrey added that he himself had once been approached about a transfer to Kodiak, but refused because he was raised in Kodiak.

GARY POWELL, State Fire Marshall and Director, Division of Fire Prevention, responded to Representative Stevens' question about transferring fire marshal duties to local entities. He said that the division is attempting to move fire marshal duties to local entities by deferring the authority to qualified communities. To qualify, the community must have a police department, a fire department and issue building permits. To date, the fire marshal has issued eight full deferrals and one partial deferral, he said.

MR. POWELL said that troopers do investigate to determine the cause and origin of fires. If the cause is suspicious, they work jointly with private insurance investigators. In response to Representative James' inquiry about statistics for prevention programs, Mr. Powell said there has been a downward trend in fire fatalities and that the number has leveled off in the last five years.

COMMISSIONER GODFREY said a female wing with 20 new beds is being added to the Public Safety Academy, in Sitka. He said the academy trains all law enforcement officers statewide except for the Anchorage Police Department, which has its own academy. The Public Safety Academy also trains VPSOs and has done some contract training for the Coast Guard.

REPRESENTATIVE COGHILL asked what "non-criminal" calls are.

COMMISSIONER GODFREY said that "non-criminal" means the assistance does not result in an arrest. For example, a non-

criminal action might involve state troopers assisting local police with an autopsy in a murder case.

COMMISSIONER GODFREY discussed criminal investigations and the coordination between the state medical examiner, the state troopers and the Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB). The state medical examiner performs autopsies and the CIB conducts forensic investigations, he explained. He said DNA testing is expanding. The crime lab is collecting DNA swabs from convicted criminals. As the use of DNA expands, the crime lab will require additional funding, he said.

COMMISSIONER GODFREY thanked the committee for the opportunity to testify.

#### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

#### **COMMITTEE ACTION**

The committee took no action.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

REPRESENTATIVE COGHILL adjourned the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 9:16 a.m.

NOTE: The meeting was recorded and handwritten log notes were taken. A copy of the tape(s) and log notes may be obtained by contacting the House Records Office at State Capitol, Room 3, Juneau, Alaska 99801 (mailing address), (907) 465-2214, and after adjournment of the second session of the Twenty-Second Alaska State Legislature this information may be obtained by contacting the Legislative Reference Library at (907) 465-3808.