

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

February 10, 2004
9:07 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Bruce Weyhrauch, Chair
Representative Jim Holm, Vice Chair
Representative Bob Lynn
Representative Paul Seaton
Representative Max Gruenberg

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative John Coghill
Representative Ethan Berkowitz

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW: DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

[For the regular meeting minutes, see the 8:02 a.m. minutes for this date.]

TAPES

04-15, SIDE(S) A

CHAIR BRUCE WEYHRAUCH called the meeting of the House State Affairs Standing Committee back to order at 9:07 a.m. Present were Representatives Holm, Lynn, Seaton, Gruenberg, and Weyhrauch.

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

CHAIR WEYHRAUCH introduced Commissioner William Tandeske of the Alaska Department of Public Safety. Chair Weyhrauch noted that the House State Affairs Standing Committee has jurisdiction over the Department of Public Safety; each year the committee requests that the commissioner update the members and the general public of the department's activities.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE introduced the following employees of the Department of Public Safety: Ted Bachmann, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner; Colonel Julia Grimes, Director, Division of Alaska State Troopers; David Schade, Director,

Division of Statewide Services; Dan Spencer, Director, Division of Administrative Services; Gary Powell, Director State Fire Marshall, Division of Fire Prevention; and LeeAnn Lucas, Special Assistant, Office of the Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE spoke about what the Department of Public Safety has been doing since the last overview before the House State Affairs Standing Committee. He referred to slides that were made available to the committee members [included in the committee packet]. The slides help to define what the Department of Public Safety is trying to accomplish.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE stated that the department does not limit itself to statutory rules, but helps other law enforcement agencies in whatever way it can. He went on to say that cooperation with local agencies is paramount. The department stands ready to take care of issues for other law enforcement agencies when individual agencies may not have the resources to handle certain activities themselves.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE assured the committee the department is interested in being successful in the long term with the present reorganization plan. Fiscal functions have been centralized. A Division of Statewide Services exists. These are long-term functions of the Department of Public Safety and are being given special attention by the department.

REPRESENTATIVE HOLM, in response to further discussion, stated he has a problem with the merger of the law enforcement divisions of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game and the Department of Public Safety.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE responded that all of these people are fully trained, commissioned Alaska State Troopers - not just game wardens. Under the new guidelines, a Trooper stationed at any post can work in both capacities - as a law enforcement officer and wildlife protection officer. This change has been made to promote efficiency.

CHAIR WEYHRAUCH asked whether an Alaska Department of Fish & Game "protection officer" from Hoonah could be pulled from his/her community if there was a need for him/her to do highway patrol or a murder investigation in another area of the state due to a high level of crime.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE replied that the aim of the Department of Public Safety in that regard is to get other tangible work

accomplished in the periods of time when the activity is down in some areas of the state.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE spoke to the similarities in the two divisions. He indicated that the goal is to make optimum use of all individuals in the Department of Public Safety. The department has to focus on specific things it is not funded to do. In response to questions from the committee, Commissioner Tandeske described how the department deals with areas of weakness and how it will best address its mission and make optimum use of its resources. He told the committee that his staff was available to answer questions.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG mentioned the problem of people giving false urinalysis samples. He said he believes that there are no statutes prohibiting such a thing, and he wants to know if it is easier to enforce general statutes rather than specific statutes.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE stated he would like to think about that issue.

REPRESENTATIVE GRUENBERG thanked the Fire Marshall for his help on the carbon monoxide legislation.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE elaborated more thoroughly on other aspects of the merger, including combining and reducing staff to eliminate costs and increase efficiency. More resources at the ground level were needed, and therefore, some upper level positions were reclassified to troopers. Wildlife law enforcement remains a core function for the division, as well as highway safety and general law enforcement. The division has increased drug and alcohol seizures up 27 percent from 2002 to 2003. A drunk driving enforcement team has been developed. Work has begun on rural public safety and enhancements have been made to the Village Public Safety Officer program. He also stated that troopers have been moved throughout the state in order to have the resources readily available when and where they are needed in the major hubs such as Fairbanks, Palmer, and the Kenai area. Anchorage was excluded as it has it's own major police department. The Division of Statewide Services will be doing all it can to support all law enforcement and agencies, as well as the public.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE, in response to a question from Representative Gruenberg, clarified that the records and identification departments, for example, listed in the Power

Point presentation are not manned by troopers, which he indicated means less expense. He also spoke about the reorganization of the Division of Fire Prevention.

MR. POWELL, in response to a question regarding the shorter life expectancy of a firemen due to smoke inhalation and other hazards of the job, responded that the issue was more complicated than what could be answered in a few words, but basically there are many reasons why people might think that the statement has credence. No studies have been conducted in Alaska to confirm or deny such a statement. In response to a question from Representative Holm regarding an ice hotel, he explained his office is also in charge of the safety codes for building construction in the State of Alaska. An ice hotel needs to be properly constructed even though it is not a fire hazard. He stated that the State of Alaska operates under the International Building Code (IBC).

MR. POWELL, in response Representative Gruenberg, explained that the reason fire trucks often respond to an emergency call that is not fire-related is because in many cases emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and fire personnel are cross trained, and that can be the most efficient way to answer the call. He added that such [dual response] doesn't happen in all parts of the state.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE spoke to the fiscal year 2005 (FY 05) budget request for 20 new trooper positions. These new positions directly address core missions to long-term objectives. Other challenges for the department are homeland security, SERT [Special Emergency Response Teams], and the problem of local funding being down.

CHAIR WEYHRAUCH spoke to the relationship between the state and the villages that have patrol officers. He related that he has received information via phone calls or office visits from people who are concerned that these tribal police officers think they have police authority, but that they are not recognized by the state as having any such authority.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON expressed interest in the effect of the passage of the concealed handgun permit legislation.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE responded to Representative Gruenberg's comment on problems finding troopers who are willing to live in rural areas of Alaska. He conceded it is a problem. Some areas have subsidized housing in the rural areas.

CHAIR WEYHRAUCH expressed interest in finding out what the internal process and the public's involvement might be when there is a trooper involved in a shooting - either a regular shooting or a fatality.

COMMISSIONER TANDESKE, in response to a question from Chair Weyhrauch, reviewed the agencies within the department. He indicated he would get back to Representative Holm on a question regarding whether the folks within the Division of Statewide Services are bonded.

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON requested the commissioner look into fire requirements being imposed that might be putting people out of business down in the Homer area, regarding sprinkler system regulations.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

COMMITTEE ACTION

The committee took no action.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:02 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-Third Alaska State Legislature this information may be obtained by contacting the Legislative Reference Library at (907) 465-3808.