

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 27, 2019

1:02 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Matt Claman, Chair
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux, Vice Chair
Representative Chuck Kopp
Representative Adam Wool
Representative Laddie Shaw
Representative David Eastman

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Louise Stutes

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

Violent Crimes Compensation Board

John Francis - Wasilla

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JOHN FRANCIS

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified and answered questions as appointee to the Violent Crimes Compensation Board.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:02:36 PM](#)

CHAIR MATT CLAMAN called the House Judiciary Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Representatives Claman, LeDoux, Shaw, Eastman, and Wool were present at the call to order. Representative Kopp arrived as the meeting was in progress.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :
Violent Crimes Compensation Board

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CHAIR CLAMAN announced that the only order of business would be a confirmation hearing for the appointment of John Francis to the Violent Crimes Compensation Board. Chair Claman opened public testimony on Mr. Francis's appointment.

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JOHN FRANCIS, Appointee, Violent Crimes Compensation Board, shared some biographical information and said he is the owner of Mat-Su Computer Medics in Wasilla. He stated that he is the founding administrator of the Facebook groups "Stolen in Alaska" and "Mat Valley Crime Discussion." He said he started these groups because there had previously been no way for his company to easily search for stolen computers. He added that he felt the groups were a great way for his business to give back to the community. He said the groups help to keep the public informed about local criminals.

MR. FRANCIS stated that, as his Facebook groups evolved and his business grew, victims of violent crimes began reaching out to him through Facebook and in person. He said most victims of violent crimes understandably do not feel comfortable speaking publicly about the effect violent crime has had on their lives. He called it frustrating that he can do little to help these people other than be supportive. He noted that he has helped connect victims to his contacts in law enforcement, the legal system, and politics. He said the reason he wants to serve on the Violent Crimes Compensation Board is because he is very passionate about helping people to recover from violence. He noted that a violent crime affects "the entire family." He said he is compassionate "almost to a fault." He pointed to management skills he has acquired through business and parenthood. He said he is skilled at determining when people are telling the truth and when people are embellishing.

MR. FRANCIS addressed questions that have arisen about his ghost-hunting hobby. He described how he and his wife entered into ghost-hunting. He explained that he and his wife try to distance themselves from the ghost hunting conducted by self-proclaimed psychics and mediums. He discussed the comfort felt by people for whom they investigate unexplainable experiences.

He stated that this venture is another method of helping people and that "there is nothing weird or demonic about it."

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REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN asked about Mr. Francis's experience in the United States Coast Guard (USCG).

MR. FRANCIS said he entered the USCG Reserve in 1979 with the intent to transition to active duty after graduating high school. He explained that the USCG was at that time part of the Department of Transportation (DOT) and, due to DOT budget cuts, he was not allowed to transition to active duty. He said he was put into inactive reserves around 1983 and left with an honorable discharge two years later.

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The committee took a brief at-ease at 1:10 p.m.

[1:10:38 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WOOL asked for further detail on [Alaska Ghost Hunting] (AKGH).

MR. FRANCIS said AKGH is the ghost-hunting group he started approximately ten years ago. He called the group "pretty much inactive." He noted that the group did "some episodes for the Discovery Channel."

REPRESENTATIVE WOOL requested additional details.

MR. FRANCIS drew a distinction between his hobby of ghost-hunting and the sort of ghost-hunting on television. He called AKGH "a very simple group" and said they are only interested in answering people's questions about spirits and the like. He said AKGH consists of his family and friends. He explained that AKGH would go to people's homes or small businesses and seek out an explanation for various "experiences." He said they often attributed strange sounds to plumbing or the wind. When no explanation can be established, he said AKGH talks it out with the person to settle fears. He said, "We don't believe in demons or anything like that."

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CHAIR CLAMAN asked for information about Mr. Francis's involvement with a Mat-Su victims' rights [Facebook] group.

MR. FRANCIS clarified that he was not a part of a victims' rights group. Mr. Francis explained that the two Facebook groups he does oversee were intended for individuals to report crimes of theft, not violent crimes. He said that the two groups are highly active and that he manages both groups as founding administrator.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked for additional information about his role in managing the groups.

MR. FRANCIS stated that he shares news articles to the group and generally refrains from discussion. He gave an example of a much-discussed domestic dispute that generated many comments. He said he supports victims and has little compassion for perpetrators.

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CHAIR CLAMAN asked where Mr. Francis attended high school.

MR. FRANCIS said he attended Ferris High School in Spokane, Washington.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked if Mr. Francis has ever pled guilty to any crimes.

MR. FRANCIS answered "yes."

CHAIR CLAMAN said, "Tell me about that."

MR. FRANCIS said he had been "involved with some bad people" in high school and was involved in crimes. He noted that he left the group and moved away. He said one of these people contacted him later and asked for Mr. Francis to "help him do some things." Mr. Francis said he turned that individual in to the state patrol and that the individual was arrested. He said he "turned state's evidence," disclosed his past, and never looked back.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked when it was that Mr. Francis pled guilty to a crime and what the product was to that guilty plea.

MR. FRANCIS stated there was one instance in which he pled guilty to burglary and another in which he pled guilty to insurance fraud. He said they were 40 years ago.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked what Mr. Francis learned from these experiences in relation to his current application to be on the Violent Crimes Compensation Board.

MR. FRANCIS said it makes him very sad that he was ever involved in criminal activity. He said he was an entirely different person back then. He expressed regret for every hurting anyone.

CHAIR CLAMAN said it sounds like he is someone who erred in his past but was given an opportunity to reform and rehabilitate himself.

MR. FRANCIS said "yes."

CHAIR CLAMAN asked if Mr. Francis believes others who have committed crimes should be given an opportunity to have that same chance at rehabilitation.

MR. FRANCIS said yes, except those who have committed violent crimes.

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REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked if Mr. Francis's guilty plea to insurance fraud occurred while he was in high school.

MR. FRANCIS said he was 18 or 19 when he pled guilty to insurance fraud.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked if the insurance fraud was a felony or misdemeanor.

MR. FRANCIS said he thinks it was a felony on account of the value.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked if the burglary was a felony or misdemeanor.

MR. FRANCIS said he thinks it was also a felony. He clarified that he pled to those crimes at the same time.

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REPRESENTATIVE SHAW asked whether Mr. Francis would remain active with the [Facebook] groups should his appointment be confirmed.

MR. FRANCIS said that, unless he is told he cannot, he will.

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CHAIR CLAMAN asked whether Mr. Francis's felony convictions occurred before or after his time in the USCG Reserve.

MR. FRANCIS answered that the pleas were during his time in the USCG Reserve.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked for confirmation that Mr. Francis recalls these pleas to have occurred in or around 1985 or 1986.

MR. FRANCIS said the crimes themselves were much earlier. He said it is "possible" the pleas occurred in 1985 or 1986. He said it is difficult to remember.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked for confirmation that these events all took place in Washington.

MR. FRANCIS answered "yes."

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REPRESENTATIVE WOOL asked what his sentence was for his crimes.

MR. FRANCIS answered "nothing." He said he might have spent a weekend in jail.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked if Mr. Francis was on probation.

MR. FRANCIS answered that he was on probation for at least five years. He said the judge originally wanted to impose two years of probation, but he requested five years instead.

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CHAIR CLAMAN, after ascertaining that no one wished to testify, closed public testimony.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX said Mr. Francis has an interesting hobby.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN thanked Mr. Francis for applying for the position and for answering committee questions.

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REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX stated that the House Judiciary Standing Committee has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointee and recommends John Francis's name be forwarded to a joint session of the House and Senate for consideration for the Violent Crimes Compensation Board. She said signing the committee report does not reflect intent by any of the members to vote for or against this individual during any further sessions for the purpose of confirmation.

CHAIR CLAMAN said Mr. Francis's name would be forwarded to the joint session.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Judiciary Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 1:22 p.m.