

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

February 26, 2019

3:03 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Zack Fields, Co-Chair  
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins, Co-Chair  
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux  
Representative Andi Story  
Representative Adam Wool  
Representative Sarah Vance  
Representative Laddie Shaw

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

Commissioner, Department of Corrections

Nancy Dahlstrom - Eagle River

- HEARD

Commissioner, Department of Public Safety

Amanda Price - Anchorage

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

NANCY DAHLSTROM, Commissioner Designee  
Department of Corrections (DOC)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as appointed commissioner of the Department of Corrections.

AMANDA PRICE, Commissioner Designee

Department of Public Safety (DPS)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as appointed commissioner of the Department of Public Safety (DPS).

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CO-CHAIR JONATHAN KREISS-TOMKINS** called the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:03 p.m. Representatives Fields, LeDoux, Story, Wool, Vance, Shaw, and Kreiss-Tomkins were present at the call to order.

**CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)**

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**CO-CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS** announced that the only order of business would be confirmation hearings.

**Commissioner, Department of Corrections**

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**NANCY DAHLSTROM**, Commissioner Designee, Department of Corrections (DOC), stated that she has been in Alaska 40 years, is married to Kit, and they have four children and ten grandchildren. She mentioned that she has worked in both the public and private sector and represented Eagle River in the [Alaska State] House of Representatives.

**COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM** stated, "It's no secret that I don't have a corrections background and, then again, this administration hasn't been doing business as usual." She offered that she has the professional and educational skillset and abilities to work with people, to identify problems and opportunities, to create a path to address them, and to build a team to implement and ultimately execute the decisions. This, she maintained, makes her the right choice for the position. She relayed that she takes the position very seriously and that she is "up for the task."

**COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM** continued by saying DOC's mission is to provide secure confinement, performative programs, and community reintegration. She related her goals: employees and inmates are safe; re-entry programs help inmates transition back into

society successfully; and qualified employees - correctional officers, probation officers, and medical staff - are recruited and retained.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM mentioned the positive changes she has enacted in the few months she has been in the position - suspended or amended policies to focus on the safety of employees and inmates, as well as honoring and recognizing victims and their rights. She stated that she is committed to programs that help the incarcerated integrate back into society. She said that she recognizes that people make mistakes and through many of the programs - faith-based, work-based, substance abuse, and others - DOC can encourage people to become law abiding citizens again. She relayed that she has recently hired someone with extensive experience in criminal justice and re-entry.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM reported that DOC has a dedicated staff of 1,900 men and women throughout the state; recruiting and retaining staff is difficult. She mentioned that she has created a working group that is dedicated to addressing the issues, challenges, and opportunities for recruitment and retention head-on.

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REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked how Commissioner Dahlstrom planned to respond to the problem of drugs and other contraband smuggled into the [prison] system.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM acknowledged that was a serious concern and asserted that she has started to address this problem. She offered that it would be inappropriate in the committee hearing to relay the ways that DOC is addressing this concern.

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CO-CHAIR FIELDS asked to hear Commissioner Dahlstrom's long-term and short-term goals for stronger re-entry programs. He cited that statistics show progress in reducing the recidivism rate, which has decreased about six percentage points. He added that part of the success is due to the state working with faith-based and non-profit organizations to improve re-entry.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM replied that she has a new hire that she has tasked with assessing every DOC program and other programs with which DOC could become involved. This will enable staff to

identify what exists and the available resources for DOC to help the inmate population. She added that she is unable to give specifics on any of the programs but asserted that there are opportunities.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS stated that he would like to see consistent tracking of the percentage of inmates, released and on parole, having offender management plans, and of those offender management plans, which plans address employment, substance abuse, and housing. He expressed his concern that the offender management plans be meaningful and actually address the critical factors that influence whether someone will be successful after release.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM agreed and asserted that such tracking will be performed. She stated that she looks forward to working with the representative in the future.

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REPRESENTATIVE SHAW asked whether the budget includes the closing of a correctional facility.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM relayed that the budget has a projection for closing part of the Wildwood Correctional Complex ("Wildwood").

REPRESENTATIVE SHAW said that he spoke with a social worker at the facility who mentioned a potential of 46 employees affected by the partial closure. He asked if that was true.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that there are 46 position control numbers (PCNs) that could be affected. She stated that she has expressed to the employees her intention to absorb those workers into other institutions.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked for the reason for the partial facility closure.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that the budget contains changes that, if passed, would include the closure. She added that the budget projects moving 500 inmates to out-of-state facilities. She offered should that occur, the hope is that the inmates at Wildwood would be moved to institutions where they

can take advantage of the programs that the other facilities offer. The Wildwood building would be "mothballed."

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked whether the closure was part of the proposal to ship inmates out of Alaska.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM confirmed that was the proposal in the budget.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY mentioned that shipping inmates out of state had been done previously with detrimental effects to families. She asked if there is any reason the negative effects would be different this time.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM answered that she has reviewed the previous experience and proposes bringing inmates back into Alaska sooner - with two or three years left on their sentences rather than a few months - for better integration. She maintained that the [negative] effects on families is a natural consequence of being incarcerated.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY offered that there are many effects of being incarcerated and it is important to look at the long-term effects. She maintained that respect and humane treatment for the inmates is necessary for successful re-entry, as 90 percent of inmates come back into the communities. She contended that the expense of out-of-state incarceration was extensive and expressed that she would rather see that money stay inside the state. She opined that inmates being close to home not only benefits the inmates, but businesses that support the facilities and, indirectly, the community. She asked if an analysis is being done to weigh the costs and savings of in-state incarceration versus out-of-state incarceration.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that an official analysis is not being done at present but something that she will take into consideration.

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether the commissioner had any input in the implementation of DOC funds and whether the decisions regarding Wildwood closure and its employees were hers or belonged to someone else.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM replied that those budgetary decisions were made by the Office of Management & Budget (OMB).

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked how the commissioner plans to work with each facility and the DOC employees going forward during future years' budgeting processes in order to maintain the DOC mission and goal of safety, re-entry, and recruitment.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM answered that she will follow the law and abide by the budget that is passed by the legislature and the governor; with any changes, she will reevaluate the effectiveness of DOC practices, readjust expenditures, and ensure that funds are spent properly.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE referred to Alaska's increased number of inmates who are aging and having increasingly costly medical needs. She asked whether more affordable treatment of these conditions in the Lower 48 is a factor in relocating inmates out of state - in order to maintain inmate safety and find efficiencies. She asked also if these patients make up the bulk of inmates to be relocated.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM replied that these patients do not make up the bulk of the inmates being relocated, but these patients are in her consideration as far as getting them the care that they need. She added that DOC medical providers assist in determining the facilities that are available and have the services needed so that inmates can receive proper care. She maintained that inmates with medical issues have not been identified as a group to be moved out of state.

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CO-CHAIR FIELDS mentioned the commissioner's testimony that the partial closure of the Wildwood facility was OMB's proposal. He asked whether it was also OMB's proposal to ship inmates out of state.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that the partial closure was projected in the budget.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS asked for the recidivism rate for inmates incarcerated outside of Alaska compared with that of in-state inmates. He mentioned reports that outside prisons, often run by private for-profit companies, are a criminal training ground.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that she would provide the committee with that information, as Alaska has not sent inmates out of state for several years.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS reiterated the point that Alaska may be saving "a couple bucks" now but ultimately getting higher recidivism rates and more crime. He asked, "Are we really saving money?"

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CO-CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS referred to the line between the commissioner's office and OMB as far as control and policy making and asked, "Where does your scope of authority begin and end, vis-a-vis OMB and vis-a-vis the governor's office, in terms of making DOC policy?"

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM answered that she has open communication with OBM and with the governor's office and is free to discuss anything she deems important. She stated that she does not take facility closures and the moving of inmates lightly. She maintained that nothing would be done without full analysis and scrutiny; decisions will not be based just on financial issues, but on proper care of the inmates.

CO-CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS asked whether there are policy-making areas in DOC for which she has sole authority; he asked her to identify those areas.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that she has authority over all DOC policies.

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REPRESENTATIVE WOOL asked for confirmation that the decision to move inmates to out-of-state prisons would be hers independently of the administration.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM answered, "That's correct."

REPRESENTATIVE WOOL asked whether she has a position on the policy of moving inmates out of state. He asked whether moving inmates is a policy she is interested in pursuing or whether she could say categorically she is not interested in moving inmates out of state, if possible.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded, "It was proposed in the budget and I am doing my due diligence in pursuing all the information I can on that." She maintained that "once that's completed, we'll make a decision on that."

REPRESENTATIVE WOOL referred to the closure of Wildwood and the reassignment of employees. He asked if his recollection was correct that the last time a facility was closed, the personnel were shifted to other areas where they were needed and, therefore, were not laid off.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM relayed that she cannot speak specifically about what happened during a previous closure but declared that her goal and intent is that DOC would retain everyone who wished to be retained.

REPRESENTATIVE WOOL asked for clarification on the movement of employees and inmates due to the [partial] closure of Wildwood.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that there is an official process of classification of inmates - based on various factors - that would determine the ones who would be moved out of state and the ones who would stay. She mentioned that there is one employee left at DOC who was present during the previous transfer of inmates, therefore, has experience with the process. She stated that employees would not be transferred out of state but may wish to transfer to other in-state facilities.

REPRESENTATIVE WOOL suggested that sending 500 inmates out of state would result in less need for the 1,900 DOC employees currently in the department. He offered that releasing unneeded PCNs would be motivation for the closure.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM opined that the possibility Representative Wool described was highly unlikely since every year DOC averages about 120 employment changes, that is, people leaving the department. She stated that one day last week there were 55 medical positions, 75 correctional positions, and 30 probation positions open throughout the state. She added that these people did not transfer. She stated that most likely DOC would lose a few employees, but her hope and plan is to keep everyone.

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REPRESENTATIVE WOOL suggested that due to losing PCNs through attrition and retirement, employees would not need to be laid off, yet the payroll would decrease.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM replied, "Correct."

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked what cultural shift Commissioner Dahlstrom plans to implement at DOC considering the employee attrition and the newly created working group for employees. She mentioned that the commissioner sets the tone for the department and that tone impacts every employee. She asked what tone the commissioner wished to see within the department.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM replied that the working group will be a combination of employees covering every area of the facility. She said that she has not given the group a specific goal because she wants the process to be employee driven. She added that she wants the working group to come up with recommendations for the department. She stated that the tone with which she has always operated is one of an open-door policy, listening to the suggestions of employees, and implementing them if possible.

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CO-CHAIR FIELDS relayed that the state has saved money through Medicaid expansion and much of the savings has come through inmates. He asked her to comment on continued opportunities to achieve general cost savings through the DOC Medicaid expansion population.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that for anyone in a DOC facility, all medical costs are incurred by the state. The state is unable to bill Medicaid for any of the costs for an inmate in a DOC facility.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS expressed his understanding that Medicaid expansion does cover the costs of treatment outside of a facility for someone in DOC custody. He maintained that in those instances, Medicaid expansion represents a significant cost savings for the state's general fund.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM replied that she would research that question and provide information to the committee.

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CO-CHAIR FIELDS referred to the state's strong prison industries program, which he maintained has been an important component of re-entry. He asked for Commissioner Dahlstrom's vision for expanding prison industries while at the same time avoiding competition with the private sector or displacing working Alaskans.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that she believes in the importance of work for a person's health - physical, mental, spiritual, and social - and a strong work ethic is very important and helps people succeed in life. She concluded that she is supportive of work programs; there are work programs in several of the institutions; some pay the inmates an income; and some do not pay but teach the inmates skills. She stated that she wishes to expand the programs, improve the programs, and involve some additional industries.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY mentioned job training programs for inmates to teach them 21st century skills, prepare them for the existing job market, and increase the likelihood of success outside of prison. She asked whether DOC has a system for assessing the number of [inmates] released, the demands and goals for the work programs, the goals set by DOC to prepare the inmates for success when returning to their communities, and timelines.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that DOC has interesting dynamics; it doesn't choose who comes "in the door" or when the person leaves; the length of incarceration differs, as does the attitudes of the inmates. She stated that she knows that tracking the DOC program offerings and tracking the success of the programs are very important. She affirmed that measuring outcomes helps DOC expend time, effort, and resources on successful programs.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked Commissioner Dahlstrom about re-entry coaches.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM maintained that it would be ideal if every person who was released from prison had a re-entry coach. She stated that re-entry is very important to her. She expressed that she wishes to "grow" those programs and have them be successful. She mentioned the many different situations surrounding the release of a prisoner and said that the ideal is for each one to leave with a plan and a coach or mentor to help them navigate housing, employment, transportation, and finances. She added that some of the inmates may never have had those experiences in life.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked what the budget was for re-entry. She asked why \$1 million in federal re-entry funding was turned down.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM said that she would provide information on the amount in the DOC budget for re-entry. She explained that the decision to turn down the \$1 million grant funding was her decision. She maintained that accepting the funds would have put in place an infrastructure and "things within the department that really weren't directly touching the client." She maintained that after several months, the money would be gone; it was "one-time" and not continued. She expressed her belief that turning down the funds was the most responsible action.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY expressed her hope that DOC would take advantage of such an opportunity for grant money by doing "one-time" things with it, such as training for re-entry coaches and other activities, to capitalize on funds that are not ongoing. She asked whether Commissioner Dahlstrom was open to finding one-time uses for funds that could not be generated in the future.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that she is absolutely open to that, but she wants to ensure that Alaska has the authority to use the funds as it sees fit and in a way that will help the inmates.

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CO-CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS asked Commissioner Dahlstrom what changes she envisioned for DOC that would take the department in a different direction than the previous administration and what aspects of the department she planned to continue, philosophically or programmatically.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM answered that she never had the opportunity to work with the previous commissioner and never met him. She maintained that there were many "good things" done in the department; there are changes that she has made; and there are changes that she will continue to make. She stated that her changes are not a reflection of her not liking how the previous commissioner operated.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS asked her whether she has spoken with the previous commissioner by phone.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that she has not, and her understanding is that he is employed out of state.

CO-CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS commented that although every commissioner can and should lead an agency as he/she sees fit, in the course of a transition, there is always information and knowledge that could be gleaned from one's predecessor, even given profound philosophical differences, and a benefit for doing so.

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REPRESENTATIVE VANCE referred to the \$1 million federal funding that was rejected and the stated reasoning for that - the funds would not "reach the actual client; it didn't touch them." She asked for more information about the grant requirements and the inability to maintain the grant, to better understand why the grant was turned down. She opined that the committee was having difficulty understanding why the grant money was not accepted and utilized.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that the grant would have required hiring additional employees with office space and equipment; a program would have been implemented and then would need to be terminated.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether there was a projected dollar amount for maintaining the program and what the program would have been.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM replied that the program would have been a re-entry program. She explored reapplying for the funds and received information that DOC could not reapply. She questioned, "Is there even a 50/50 chance we can ... reapply every year and maybe we'll get it and we can continue this?" She stated it was a one-time end-of-discussion grant.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked for confirmation that Commissioner Dahlstrom [under the grant] would have to hire employees, and after the money was spent, the employees would have to be let go or absorbed into the department.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded, "Yes. I would have had to let them go."

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CO-CHAIR FIELDS related that when he worked for the Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DLWD), he visited the education center at Anvil Mountain [Correctional Center]. He was shocked to find a roomful of computers that did not work. He stated that inmates at that facility were not able to do important re-entry related tasks, such as adult basic education to obtain General Education Development (GED) [certificates]. He stated that DLWD staff subsequently transferred computers from DLWD to DOC and sent them to Anvil Mountain so that the facility would have functional computers. He urged the commissioner to communicate with the supervisors of all the [correctional] facilities to ensure the education and training rooms have functional equipment.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM replied that she can commit to that and believes it to be an important service.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS referred to DOC's role as a series of substance abuse treatment centers. He mentioned that inmates involuntarily go through detoxification (detox) in many circumstances and DOC has started providing some medically assisted treatment. He asked her to comment on the high percentage of inmates with substance abuse issues and to outline her short- and medium-term plans for integrating substance abuse treatment for inmates who are going through withdrawal and who need treatment, in order to reduce the likelihood that they start using again upon release.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM conceded that the point Representative Fields makes is very important; it is a problem DOC cannot fix alone. She stated that addiction and substance abuse are universal problems dealt with by every department. She offered that every effort is made to keep a person who is detoxing safe; they are monitored regularly. She said, "By the same token, we are not a mental health facility." She maintained that the current discussions between DOC and the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) are regarding this issue and how to deal with it. She relayed that she recognizes this as a serious problem; she is concerned about it; and she is committed to dealing with it. She said that DOC will be part of the "positive answer" in working on it; however, she does not have all the answers.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS responded by saying, "Whether we like it or not, essentially DOC is a mental health treatment agency." He mentioned that his hope is that as she continues to look at dealing with a population with high incidence of addiction, DOC

would work with DHSS on ensuring that there is counseling available along with medically assisted treatment for inmates who are detoxing in order to increase the likelihood that they succeed after they detox - modeling the activities of non-profit providers outside of correctional facilities.

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REPRESENTATIVE WOOL referred to recidivism charts [on slides 5 and 6 of a PowerPoint presentation by DOC dated February 5, 2019, entitled "Alaska Recidivism & Reentry"]. He restated Commissioner Dahlstrom's testimony that DOC does not control who comes into its facilities or how long they stay. He suggested that DOC does have some influence how on how soon they come back. He cited from the charts that recidivism for new crimes was 32 percent and recidivism for those convicted of a felony and returning due to a felony is 22 percent. He mentioned that Alaska's recidivism rate is 61 percent and asked if the gap between the lower rates and the 61 percent rate is due to people violating conditions of parole. He further inquired if violating conditions of parole is counted in the recidivism rates.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that she will provide that information to the committee.

REPRESENTATIVE WOOL referred to the trip that former DOC Commissioner Dean Williams took to Norway along with Senator Pete Kelly and Representative Bryce Edgmon [during the Thirtieth Alaska State Legislature, 2017-2018] to tour its facilities and speak with the corrections officers. He stated that all three were very impressed and received a great deal of insight on how the Norway prison system dealt with recidivism. He asked whether Commissioner Dahlstrom had familiarized herself with that trip and the concepts learned through that trip.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM answered that she was aware of the trip and that those that attended felt they learned a great deal. She mentioned that she has not been to Norway. She related that she found documentation in the commissioner's office about the trip and has read it. She stated that she is open to considering Norway's institutions and institutions everywhere to learn how Alaska can "beat" the recidivism.

REPRESENTATIVE WOOL, in reference to prison industries, stated that he supports inmates earning wages to be used inside prison

and to bank for when they are released. He asked whether she also supports such goals.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM responded that she absolutely approves of those goals.

REPRESENTATIVE WOOL asked about the use of telephones in facilities and the cost of telephone calls.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM answered that there are certain pods and areas in different facilities providing varying access to telephones. She expressed her understanding that an inmate can call anyone on his/her approved call list - developed by the superintendent - and the calls are collect calls.

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REPRESENTATIVE WOOL inquired as to the cost of calls - rate per minute - and whether that rate is inflated due to prison personnel needing to monitor the calls. He mentioned that he heard that the rate was several dollars per minute.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM replied that she did not know but would provide that information. She offered that rates may be different in different parts of the state.

REPRESENTATIVE WOOL asked whether pregnant inmates are required to be in shackles while giving birth.

COMMISSIONER DAHLSTROM expressed her belief that the answer is not "cut and dried"; it depends on the violation for which they have been incarcerated. She maintained that DOC wants to keep these women and everyone else safe.

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CO-CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS moved on to the confirmation hearing for the commissioner of the Department of Public Safety (DPS).

**Commissioner, Department of Public Safety**

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AMANDA PRICE, Commissioner Designee, Department of Public Safety (DPS), stated that she has lived in Alaska 40 years; she and her husband live in Anchorage and have three children. She relayed that 20 years ago she accepted a position managing a small non-

profit organization in Alaska, which gave her the opportunity to travel to very rural communities to provide immediate and necessary services to Alaskans in those communities. She maintained that the rewards of being able to provide needed services for people in the communities changed the direction of her life. She moved from that position to several other executive director positions for non-profit organizations and served on boards for non-profit organizations; her sole focus was improving and expanding services to Alaskans in the most rural communities. She relayed that these opportunities afforded her extensive and profound knowledge on strategic planning, operational management, operating a significant budget, being very conscientious on how dollars are spent, and getting the most output for every dollar utilized. She added that she also had the opportunity to engage in media relations and public relations and to start to delve into policy development and legislative interaction.

COMMISSIONER PRICE relayed that when she accepted the position as executive director of Standing Together Against Rape (STAR) - the sole rape crisis center for the state - her passion for service came together with her genuine passion, which is working with victims of violence in Alaska. She said that while she was employed as executive director for STAR, she benefitted from working with exceptional professionals in the Special Victims Unit (SVU), the Crimes Against Children Unit (CACU), the Alaska Bureau of Investigations (ABI), the Office of Children's Services (OCS), forensic nursing, and family care coordinators and advocates. She saw firsthand and developed a multidisciplinary, coordinated, collaborative response that improved the state's ability to hold offenders accountable while also supporting victims in the process. She maintained that these experiences opened her eyes and gave her a deep understanding of the gaps in service that Alaska's criminal justice system faces and the challenges that law enforcement faces, particularly in rural communities.

COMMISSIONER PRICE stated that when she moved from STAR to become the senior advisor on crime policy and prevention under Governor Bill Walker, three unrelated cases crossed her desk that motivated her to require on the governor's behalf a statewide audit of Alaska's law enforcement entities. This ultimately led to the current focus on unprocessed and unsubmitted sexual assault kits. She asserted that work on this issue influenced a sustainable change in how Alaska addresses forensic evidence, not just in sexual assault cases but across the board, and how the state will process them, be responsible

to victims of violent crime, and ensure that there is adequate response.

COMMISSIONER PRICE relayed that she has been a member of the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA), the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA), public safety focused national organizations, federal entities focusing on public safety, and housing and homeless coalitions; she has committed a great deal of her time as a volunteer to expand services throughout the state. She added that she has a very strong understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and of how ACEs link directly to the current crime rate. She advocated for Alaska to address such experiences in children and determine how to move forward in preventing this generation from re-victimizing and re-perpetrating at the same level as currently.

COMMISSIONER PRICE declared that her prior work has allowed her to develop strong relationships within the Division of Alaska State Troopers (AST), including retired Colonel Jim Cockrell, former DPS Commissioner Gary Folger, and former DPS Commissioner Walt Monegan - her former supervisor. She attested to the value of connecting with former commissioners during transition and looks forward to sitting down with Mr. Monegan after his recovery from knee surgery.

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COMMISSIONER PRICE conceded that she is an unconventional choice for the position of commissioner of DPS in terms of historical practices in Alaska; historically governors have appointed a career law enforcement professional to serve as commissioner. She offered that there has been great benefit for doing so over the years and the men who have served have served well. She stated that the position of DPS commissioner was not a law enforcement position, but a civilian administrator position. It is tasked specifically with: providing overall policy and management to the department; overseeing the boards, councils, and divisions of the department; working with the legislature to ensure that the governor's and the department's initiatives and goals are being met; and ensuring that the resources allocated to the department are parsed out to ensure that mission critical services are being delivered.

COMMISSIONER PRICE continued by saying that the core mission of DPS is very clear: the statutory obligation is to protect life

and property; the constitutional authority identifies the need to protect the public. She stated that there are several divisions, boards, and councils housed under DPS that serve those critical public safety functions. She expressed her belief that the department has been remiss in supporting a variety of the divisions that exist within the department. Most people think of the department solely in terms of AST; there is a great deal more work put forward on behalf of Alaska from DPS. She added that more than half of DPS employees are not AST or [Division of] Alaska Wildlife Troopers (AWT). She cited the other entities within DPS and the work they do. The Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA) funds 24 emergency shelter programs in very rural communities throughout the state; the programs have a focus on primary prevention efforts; they work with advocacy centers to provide services for children who witness or experience trauma; they serve a critical function in providing emergency safe placement for individuals who experience domestic violence; and they work diligently to prevent crimes of domestic violence.

COMMISSIONER PRICE reported that the Division of Fire and Life Safety (DFLS) has statewide jurisdiction for plan review and fire code enforcement. She opined that DFLS has been one of the most under supported divisions within DPS. She maintained that having a focus on evaluating plan reviews and ensuring that there are safe building constructs in place in the communities reduces fire fatalities; however, historically this division has been consistently underfunded. She stated that she plans to ensure that DFLS has an adequate number of deputy fire marshals, who perform arson investigations and fire fatality investigations, and adequate staffing to ensure that the impact to commerce is lessened and plan reviews can be approved in a more streamline fashion.

COMMISSIONER PRICE relayed that the Division of Statewide Services (DSS) houses DPS's Criminal Records and Identification Bureau (CRIB) led by nationally recognized professional Kathy Monfreda. She said that DSS includes the sex offender registry; the state has approximately 3,500 registered sex offenders. The division also manages the concealed carry permits, of which there are currently approximately 11,000. The division also houses the fingerprint identification (ID) system, the Alaska Public Safety Information Network (APSIN), and emergency dispatch and 911 services. Commissioner Price also mentioned: the Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory ("state crime lab"), providing forensic services for all law enforcement statewide; the State Police Standards Council (APSC); the Alaska Fire

Standards Council (AFSC); the Division of AWT numbering 88 troopers; and the Division of AST numbering 301 troopers. She added that 19 new members of AST and 5 lateral recruits just started at the academy. She relayed that AST administers the Village Public Safety Officer (VRSO) program; she cited concern regarding this program and stated that she is eager to discuss the program with legislators.

4:11:10 PM

COMMISSIONER PRICE asserted that the direction of DPS is clear as far as priorities. The department aims to improve the access and response time in rural communities, to recruit and retain troopers, and to maintain personnel that support the troopers. She stated that she considers it a significant personal responsibility to support the men and women who serve the department by serving them and ensuring that they have adequate training and adequate equipment to safely do their jobs. She emphasized the department's obligation to be cognizant of employee wellness and emotional well-being given the difficulty of the jobs. She declared that she is passionate about the work of DPS and opined that with her experience coupled with the law enforcement experience of the deputy commissioner [Deputy Commissioner Michael Duxbury], the colonels named to lead AST and AWT [Colonel Barry Wilson, AST, and Colonel Doug Massie, AWT], and the incredibly talented staff members housed throughout the department, DPS is exceptionally positioned to move forward in a positive direction and meet [Governor Michael J. Dunleavy's] goal of improving public safety for Alaska.

4:12:15 PM

CO-CHAIR FIELDS stated that countless rural communities without local public safety presence have reported that AST refuses to deploy troopers to rural areas when residents call for public safety help with individuals who are threatening violence; it has been reported that the trooper dispatcher says, "Call us when you have a body." He asked, "Is it a DPS policy not to dispatch troopers until a violent crime has actually been committed, even when we have advance warning of potentially dangerous and even potentially deadly behavior?"

COMMISSIONER PRICE responded that DPS must follow state law, and the governor's proposed crime bill provides a fix to the challenge that the representative has identified. She stated that if there is not a threat of harm, but a generalized terroristic threat, currently AST may or may not, depending on

the scenario, have the legal right or responsibility to respond. She relayed that the governor has introduced a bill providing that a generalized threat of harm would receive a response from law enforcement prior to an actual incident of harm occurring; it is a provision which DPS deems to be an improvement; and it would be a tool allowing law enforcement to arrive and deescalate the scenario before an incident of harm occurs. She expressed her belief that the scenario described reflects a flaw in state law.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS relayed that the Office of Management & Budget (OMB) Director Donna Arduin stated that the commissioners of the various departments have suggested areas of their budgets that could be cut by the administration. He asked Commissioner Price whether she proposed a \$3 million VPSO cut or whether Ms. Arduin proposed that cut. He asked additionally whether she was aware, when the cut was proposed, that there was still five months remaining for contractors to use the previously appropriated \$3 million.

COMMISSIONER PRICE responded that she was aware of the timeframe of the cut, and the negative supplemental was introduced by the governor and OMB. She maintained that she will work within the budget that is ultimately appropriated for the VPSO program to ensure that the grantees have adequate funding to continue to recruit and hire VPSOs and to continue to purchase the supply, the fuel, the travel, and the training. She asserted that she is 100 percent confident that all ten grantees have adequate funding to do so for the remainder of this fiscal year.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS said that he heard that DPS has been slow to issue and clear background checks for candidates who are ready to begin work, causing delays in the VPSO hiring process. He asked if she had heard that and if the department was addressing it.

COMMISSIONER PRICE replied that she has not heard of that specifically. She said that, barring any additional knowledge of the source of the complaint, it is something she has not witnessed; she is currently directly involved with hiring because filling these positions is an area of focus for DPS; and she maintained that the background checks are clearing quickly. She offered that the concern may refer to individuals with recent felonies in their background who are seeking appeals for their denials; she maintained that in these cases the process does take time, because DPS must do their due diligence to

ensure that the individuals in these positions will serve the communities safely.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS asked for strategies being employed by DPS to ensure the [the presence of] VPSOs and other first responders in every community in Alaska.

COMMISSIONER PRICE responded that the concept and the deployment of improving rural public safety - both the response and the number of professionals and first responders available to provide that response - is a priority of the department and most likely the single item which consistently fills her time and that of the command staff. She offered some ideas with the caveat that they have not been vetted and the department is not ready to move forward on them until it can collaborate with the grantees. She said that the grantees have indicated that one of the challenges they experience in hiring VPSOs is the regulations associated with how the grant funds can be used. She offered that DPS is evaluating the grant agreements; it is trying to find opportunities for allowing more control to the grantees; it is considering easing regulations and allowing the grantees an easier funding mechanism and more freedom in hiring. She conceded that since the state is responsible, it wants to ensure that the decisions DPS makes is in the best interest of the state. Providing villages with a more "hands off" experience and greater control is new and somewhat concerning. She mentioned the possibility of funding a "straight dollar" amount to incorporated villages with 50 or more people to hire a village police officer. She maintained that discussions are ongoing about the most effective way to improve rural public safety.

[4:18:38 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked for a clarification of the commissioner's jurisdiction over VPSOs and the difference between a VSPO and an AST.

COMMISSIONER PRICE explained that the VPSO program is governed by state statute, which mandates that the VPSO program is created within DPS, that the legislature appropriate funding to DPS, and DPS grant those funds to the regional non-profit corporations for hire and oversight of those positions. She stated that the legislature and the governor appropriate the line item to DPS and as commissioner, she must grant that funding to the ten different non-profit organizations. She clarified that the non-profit organizations are ten different

employers with ten different levels of compensation, ten different levels of benefits, and ten different work hour and payment schedules. She emphasized that this creates one of the structural challenges with the development of the VPSO program; the VPSOs have indicated to the department that they do not feel supported or that they are getting adequate training. She relayed that DPS is responsible for delivery of grant funding, with line items to fund travel and training; however, it is the grantees obligation and accountability to ensure that their VPSOs are receiving the training. She emphasized that DPS provides the training; however, it is still the grantees' responsibility that the funds are used for that purpose. She added that there may be discrepancies among the grantees' in using the line item for training and ensuring that the VPSOs are trained. She concluded that there is no uniformity or standardization, and she, as commissioner, has no authority over the delivery of services.

[4:21:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX expressed her understanding that of the ten VPSO employers, the administrative charges range from 7-10 percent at the lower end to 48 percent at the upper end. She asked whether this was correct and whether Commissioner Price was concerned with the amount of money that is going to administration of the grants, as opposed to actual VPSO services.

COMMISSIONER PRICE said it is correct that the top indirect rate is 48 percent and one grantee charges a 9 percent administrative fee. She stated that the average administrative cost across the board for the ten programs is 33.4 percent. She maintained that she is quite concerned about the high administrative costs, as the intent of the legislature and the governor in appropriating that funding is to improve rural public safety; her concern is that the high administrative costs are impeding that effort. She mentioned that intent language was drafted by the legislature two years ago [in the fiscal year 2017 (FY 17) operating budget] indicating that if the average indirect cost associated with the program exceeded 30 percent, the program should be reevaluated, and structural shifts or caps should occur. She stated that she did not know whether the grantees have been engaged in discussions about that legislative intent language or what changes might be made. She reiterated that DPS was concerned about 48 cents on every dollar for rural public safety going to overhead.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked what the grant administrators do for the administrative costs and whether there is any difference between what is done for 48 percent versus the 9 percent.

COMMISSIONER PRICE replied that that there is no difference in the administrative work capacity of the program coordinators administering the fund. She offered that the difference in the indirect rate was due to DPS entering into agreements with the grantees - six or seven years ago - allowing them to charge the federally negotiated indirect rate. This occurred because the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) was paying its contractors the federally negotiated indirect rate, prompting the VPSO grantees to request the same percentage as the other state agency was paying. She said that at that time, DPS decided that allowing the grantees to charge the federally negotiated indirect rate was appropriate; however, she expressed her belief that the practice should be reevaluated.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked whether the federal government allows a 48 percent indirect charge on grants it gives.

COMMISSIONER PRICE replied yes. She expressed her belief that there are a variety of reasons that the indirect rate negotiated by the federal government makes sense. She opined that those reasons do not necessarily apply to the rate that the state should pay for indirect and expressed that the issue deserves additional analysis.

[4:26:09 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS asked the commissioner whether she thinks the trooper academy should be in Sitka, Alaska.

COMMISSIONER PRICE expressed that she is not opposed to or supportive of the academy moving; she does not have enough information. She expressed that she would expect to see a diligent and significant cost analysis, if there was a recommendation for it to move. She maintained that any time the state considers moving a program, it must perform a cost-benefit analysis. She opined that there is a benefit for the academy, which operates under a paramilitary style of training, to be removed from an urban area. The trainees are housed in dorms and collectively immersed in the experience.

CO-CHAIR KREISS-TOMKINS asked the commissioner to speak to any changes proposed in the governor's budget intended to create the capacity to achieve her desired outcomes, and he asked how she

envisions pursuing them without additional money for the department.

COMMISSIONER PRICE relayed that the governor's proposed budget for DPS has not specified cuts outside of the \$3 million reduction to the VPSO program, although there is a 50 percent cut in travel costs in every administrative budget, and there is some realignment of funds for fiscal "clean-up." She continued by saying that the budget allows DPS the opportunity to make significant improvements under the budget appropriated by the legislature last year [Thirtieth Alaska State Legislature, 2017-2018]. She relayed that Colonel Doug Massie put forth a supplemental budget request for an essential vessel repair; capital appropriations were available and identified in the budget to fund the repair and to replace a recently decommissioned vessel to meet the needs of AWT. She concluded that evaluation of the budget with a critical eye provides her the opportunity to ensure that every division has adequate resources, including additional opportunities to support DPS plan review inspectors and ensure an adequate number of personnel - without having to request additional funding this year. She stated, "We will absolutely have to request more money next year."

[4:30:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE mentioned her trooper ride-along [experience] and stated that she became aware of the need for better information technology (IT) equipment. She said there was a large compilation of equipment that didn't work. She relayed that the trooper needed to print a warrant in order to transfer an individual to a local facility; due to one problem after another in trying to print the warrant, the trooper's time not "on the street" was prolonged. She asked whether the commissioner has funds in the budget this year to create efficiencies for the troopers and maximize their time with "boots on the ground."

COMMISSIONER PRICE responded that she does not have enough information on what improvements and repairs are needed to responsibly ask for a dollar amount; however, it will be included in the strategic planning. She conceded that troopers should not be in the position of having to concern themselves with such details; it is not safe for them or their communities to be engaged that way; and it is a waste of DPS money. She stated that DPS will need to do a full analysis and evaluation of equipment. She referred to the build-out of the drug

enforcement unit and lamented that there is a lack of timeline for the build-out, a lack of an IT department that has been supported or encouraged to ensure prioritization of incoming projects, and a lack of communications regarding the build-out. She stated that there is a tremendous amount of opportunity to improve the IT capacity of the department; before requesting more money, DPS leadership needs to understand the challenges and the options going forward.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether Commissioner Price has the latitude to work with the [Office of Information Technology (OIT), Department of Administration (DOA)] for its IT needs, or whether it can be handled by IT within DPS.

COMMISSIONER PRICE answered that DPS has in-house IT staff within DSS. Half of the IT employees are OIT employees and half are DPS employees, but all identify DPS as their primary customer. She added that these employees are exceptionally talented; however, DPS lacks a system for the prioritization of IT projects, how IT staff will communicate with outside contractors, and a schedule for appropriate maintenance and replacement [of equipment].

[4:35:26 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked how the commissioner planned to recruit and retain troopers and officers; she mentioned the importance of the state returning to a defined benefit retirement plan option.

COMMISSIONER PRICE replied that for AST and AWT, DPS currently has a "perfect recipe": the recruitment unit has excellent leadership; DPS has changed the culture of recruiting from "you as an applicant are lucky if you are selected" to "you as an applicant are valuable to us and we want to see you succeed." She said that expectations for the applicants remain high; and she reiterated that the culture of the DPS Recruitment Unit under Lieutenant Derek DeGraaf and Sergeant David Willson is one of "you are important to us and we're going to help you through this." She reported that the largest academy class since 2003 has just started. She expressed her commitment and relayed that she has communicated clearly to the unit "what you need, you will get." She stated that DPS is aggressively pursuing lateral recruits - individuals with prior law enforcement experience - and that the department has never had a strategic plan for how to approach and recruit laterals. She said that DPS currently has five laterals in training and it anticipates another lateral

academy, which is an abbreviated academy, therefore, less expensive to the state.

COMMISSIONER PRICE relayed that in December when she first joined the department, she evaluated a 2017 commissioned officer employee survey; the results were disturbing but not unexpected. The surveys indicated low morale, questioning of the integrity of leadership, and many negative comments about the culture of leadership, such as it being a "good old boys' club." She established a voluntary recruitment work group, sent out an invitation to employees, and received a response from 52 employees interested in serving on the group. She stated that she placed the human resources manager and the training director in charge of the workgroup; the directives were to develop three to five policy recommendations for the categories in the survey receiving a sub-average score; the recommendations are due March 8, 2019. She gave examples of categories that scored low. One was the category of "inadequate training"; she asked the group for a definition of inadequate training and corresponding recommendations. Another category that scored low was reflected in the comment, "My commander doesn't know what I do every day." She explained that the response was directly related to travel restrictions; because of the travel freeze, commanders were unable to travel to post; Commissioner Price explained to the commanders that travel to post was mission critical.

[4:41:06 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked about a defined benefits retirement plan option.

COMMISSIONER PRICE relayed that DPS has not taken a position on any legislation that has been introduced regarding defined benefits. She expressed her belief that no legislation has been introduced regarding defined benefits.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY mentioned that Senator Jesse Kiehl has introduced such legislation [SB 46]. She then referred to murdered and missing indigenous women and asked whether the commissioner planned to focus resources in this area.

COMMISSIONER PRICE responded that the department has always focused resources in that area. She said the recent arrest in the Sophie Sergie case [a 25-year-old cold-case involving the sexual assault and murder of Sophie Sergie at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 1993] reflects that the department consistently and diligently has been investigating cold cases

and cases of missing and murdered Alaskans and will continue to do so.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked from where DPS gets lateral hires.

COMMISSIONER PRICE answered, "Wherever we can get them." She confirmed they are from in state and out of state.

REPRESENTATIVE LEDOUX asked why a resident of Anchorage would be happy to learn that the state was hiring from the Anchorage Police Department (APD).

COMMISSIONER PRICE answered that DPS is not actively recruiting APD officers; however, working for the state is a choice for them if they decide to leave APD for any number of reasons. She maintained that APD is a strong partner of DPS; a collaborative partnership is important to deliver public safety services.

[4:43:50 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS stated his desire that the governor clearly support a defined benefit retirement plan; he maintained that from what he has heard, it is the most important issue for recruitment and retention of frontline safety personnel.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS asked whether she supports adding additional capacity to the ABI, which has one cold-case investigator for 130 cold cases - 13 times fewer than national best practices recommend. He said that it is known from other jurisdictions that in terms of missing and murdered indigenous women, inadequate cold case investigatory capacity can be responsible for failing to catch serial killers. He asked, "Will you commit to seeking additional resources for the ABI so that we are actually tracking down these ... cold cases?"

COMMISSIONER PRICE stated that she commits to ensuring that the available troopers are placed in the most responsible positions necessary for the betterment of public safety in Alaska. She said that she cannot at this time commit directly to what he requested.

[4:45:29 PM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.