

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 22, 2023

1:34 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Sarah Vance, Chair  
Representative Jamie Allard, Vice Chair  
Representative Ben Carpenter  
Representative Craig Johnson  
Representative David Eastman  
Representative Andrew Gray  
Representative Cliff Groh

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION(S): DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY OPERATIONS

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JAMES COCKRELL, Commissioner  
Department of Public Safety  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "Department of Public Safety Overview," during the Department of Public Safety Operations presentation.

LISA PURINTON, Legislative Liaison  
Office of the Commissioner  
Department of Public Safety  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented a PowerPoint titled "Department of Public Safety Overview" during the Department of Public Safety operations presentation.

DAVID KANARIS, Chief of Forensic Laboratories

Department of Public Safety  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-presented a PowerPoint, titled "Department of Public Safety Overview House" during the Department of Public Safety operations presentation

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:34:00 PM](#)

**CHAIR SARAH VANCE** called the House Judiciary Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. Representatives Vance, Allard, Carpenter, Eastman, Gray, Groh were present at the call to order. Representative Johnson arrived as the meeting was in progress.

CHAIR VANCE talked about the Judiciary Committee and its purpose.

#### **PRESENTATION(S): Department of Public Safety Operations**

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CHAIR VANCE announced that the only order of business would be the Department of Public Safety Operations presentation.

[1:35:51 PM](#)

JAMES COCKRELL, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety, gave a PowerPoint, titled "Department of Public Safety Overview," during the Department of Public Safety Operations presentation [hard copy included in the committee packet]. He began on slide 1 by introducing all staff present on the phone line.

[1:36:51 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL provided a broad overview of the Department of Public Safety (DPS), and his presentation. He said that last year the department was provided resources that have turned to positive public safety results for Alaska. He reported that the overall crime rate is lower today than it was in 1974. He highlighted DPS efforts to seize fatal doses of fentanyl and other drugs in 2022. He talked about hiring two new investigators of murdered missing Indigenous women and persons and said there are currently 65 village public safety officers (VPSOs) serving rural Alaska. He announced that DPS is

moving forward with a new bodycam program and said a pilot program is planned to be launched in the coming months ahead of full deployment in the summer.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL outlined the department's key objectives on slide 2: recruiting and retaining troopers/staff, bolstering rural Alaska law enforcement and safety, focusing on domestic violence and sexual assault, staffing the VPSO program, protecting fisheries and wildlife resources, and investigating narcotics and major crimes. He reported that in the governor's amended budget, the department is at 951 permanent full-time staff, 16 full/part-time investigator positions, and has a total budget of \$299,938,800.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL spoke on the statewide responsibilities of DPS and the Alaska State Troopers while on slide 3. He explained that the department is responsible for law enforcement patrol and investigations, resource protection, domestic violence/sexual assault/victim services, special patrol activities, and search and rescues. He said the department also manages the Alaska Scientific Crime Detection lab, and the Alaska Public Safety Information Network (APSIN).

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REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD asked Commissioner Cockrell to speak on sexual assault kits.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL explained that when a sexual assault occurs in Alaska, and the person has undergone DNA collection and examination, then that is when the department has an unprocessed kit. The kit is then sent to the forensic lab ("crime lab") within 30 days, and the lab will hold the kit indefinitely as evidence. He said a kit is typically processed in 55 days. He noted that several years ago there was an estimated the backlog of about 1,800 kits. He reported that the department, after getting an additional kit analyst and federal funding, had cleared the 1,800 kit backlog. He noted that DPS has one long term non-permanent sexual assault investigator that reviews the kits and conducts follow up investigations. In response to a question from Representative Allard, he clarified that the department had cleared the previous backlog but currently has kits within evidence that have not been tested.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD asked for the date the department began clearing the 1,800-kit backlog, and the number of backlog kits that were processed. Further - if there is a backlog currently - if Commissioner Cockrell knows the amount.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL clarified that the number of cleared backlogged kits at that time, 1,800, is a guesstimate. He said he can provide Representative Allard with the dates and number of kits DPS processed.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD stressed the importance of getting the numbers before the end of Commissioner Cockrell's presentation.

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LISA PURINTON, Legislative Liaison, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Public Safety, said the state crime lab, on its website within DPS, tracks the number of backlogged DNA kits. Of the previously mentioned 1,800 untested kits, she said DPS has processed all of them. She explained the lab's definition of a backlogged kit: a kit that has not been processed in over 30 days. She said the number of backlogged kits currently is 48.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD aired her concern with the definition of a backlogged kit. She requested the number of processed kits.

MS. PURINTON assured Representative Allard that she will get the requested information.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD asked Ms. Purinton to confirm the total number of backlogged sexual assault kits in the entire state.

MS. PURINTON confirmed that there are 48 kits that have gone unprocessed for over 30 days. She said she will get the number of untested kits to Representative Allard.

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CHAIR VANCE asked why there is a backlog despite there being a full-time position in the lab to process kits. She asked for further information about the timeline of processing backlogged kits.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL said DPS is required by law to get the kits processed within 90 days. He said he would not consider

the 48 kits to be backlogged. He detailed the kit process: extract DNA samples, submit data into evidence, and upload the data to the combined DNA index system (CODIS). He said the information is then brought to the officer/trooper who is working the case and the Department of Law (DOL); then a decision is made whether to arrest the individual and adjudicate the case.

CHAIR VANCE asked how long it took the crime lab prior to the passage of House Bill 31, during the Thirtieth Alaska State Legislature.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL deferred to Mr. Kanaris.

[1:49:41 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 1:49 p.m. to 1:50 p.m.

[1:50:45 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE Allard asked Mr. Kanaris for the definition of a "backlogged" kit that has not been tested, as well as the number of untested and unprocessed kits in the state.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL relayed his understanding to Mr. Kanaris that there are 48 unprocessed kits.

[1:52:30 PM](#)

DAVID KANARIS, Chief of Forensic Laboratories, Department of Public Safety, explained that the crime lab defines "backlogged" as any case that is over 30 days old that has not completed testing, and said this includes the kits that have been partially completed. He reported the number of DNA cases on record statewide - comprising offences of either sexual assault with an adult or sexual assault of a minor - as 59. He said the average age of the cases is 47 days. He said the crime lab would not know of any unsubmitted kits since the kits are submitted to the lab by law enforcement agencies in the state.

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REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD asked, since the kits are submitted to the lab from law enforcement agencies across the state, whether there might be unreported cases that the department may not be aware of.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL responded there's a good chance.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD asked about the potential of there being an unknown number of unreported kits.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL explained that, by law, law enforcement agencies must return the kits within 30 days. He repeated that it takes 90 days to process a kit.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD sought further clarification on the unknown number of unreported kits.

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CHAIR VANCE asked Commissioner Cockrell to explain where the DNA test kit originates and when the counting begins to process a kit.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD noted that her question had not yet been answered.

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The committee took an at-ease from 1:55 p.m. to 1:56 p.m.

[1:56:24 PM](#)

CHAIR VANCE asked Commissioner Cockrell to answer the question she had asked prior to the at-ease.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL answered that, following a sexual assault, an officer/trooper handles the investigation, and a nurse processes the kit. The kit requires information from a full examination of the person who was assaulted. Following processing, the kit and evidence is sealed, and the law enforcement agency then returns the kit to the state crime lab. He noted that in Alaska, most sexual assaults occur against women, and that the state leads the nation in the number of sexual assaults per capita.

CHAIR VANCE asked what entity initiates the request for an unused DNA kit.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL explained that local law enforcement agencies request unprocessed sexual assault kits. He said the crime lab keeps track of every sexual assault kit that leaves and returns to the lab, processed or not. He said an

application ("app") is being developed that would allow victims of sexual assault to track their kits from initial examination to final completion.

CHAIR VANCE asked for the number of unused kits that were sent to local law enforcement agencies but were not returned to the state crime lab.

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MR. KANARIS responded that he does not have a number. He said the crime lab is the lead entity in the state that orders untested kits provided to law enforcement agencies. He said batches of 50-100 kits are typically sent out to law agencies, and said the assumption is that the "vast majority will be used." He explained that the kits are also used to be broken down for demonstration purposes, and as a result, there is no 1:1 ratio between the number of distributed and returned kits. He talked about the crime lab's plan to assign a barcode to each kit for tracking purposes, as well as for data integration to a kit tracking software. Once the app is online, he said, the crime lab will then be able to track the data that committee members are requesting.

CHAIR VANCE asked when the tracking software will be online.

MR KANARIS answered that the software will be sequentially deployed throughout the state. He said initial deployment will begin in April.

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REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN asked if there is a desire to redefine, in statute, what is considered a backlog.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL replied that, regarding the timeline outlined in AS 44.41.065, the crime lab does not have a processing backlog. He said the lab is currently processing kits quicker than what is required by statute.

REPRESENTATIVE EASTMAN asked if there has been interest within DPS to change the 90-day requirement.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL answered that since kits are being processed within the required legal timeframe, DPS is meeting current statute requirements.

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REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked Mr. Kanaris for the number of sex assault kits that have been sent out to law enforcement agencies in the state to be used.

MR. KANARIS explained that the crime lab manually tracks the kits and will continue to do so until the tracker software is operational. He offered to provide Representative Carpenter with the number of kits sent out in the last few years.

2:04:15 PM

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL presented a graphic on slide 4 depicting an organizational chart for DPS. He walked committee members through the chart.

2:05:07 PM

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL detailed the department's successes in 2022 on slide 5. He said the department added two missing and murdered Indigenous people investigators to focus on cold case disappearances and murders of Alaska Natives. He reported that DPS seized 13,425,000 potentially fatal doses of illicit fentanyl last year, as well as 81 kilograms of meth, 40 kilograms of heroin, and 3,300 bottles of illegal alcohol that were bound for dry villages.

2:06:30 PM

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON asked, in reference to the 13,425,000 fatal doses of fentanyl that were seized last year, how that amount would be measured in weight.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL could not answer.

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON queried about the volume of the seized drugs, and whether the number reflects fentanyl seized in "pure" or "cut" forms.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL answered that DPS has been seizing fentanyl in both forms. He said the department has seized fentanyl that was laced with other substances, like heroin or marijuana. He said the reason dealers lace fentanyl in drugs is that it makes "their high, higher" and the drug more addictive. He noted that last year there were about 200 drug overdoses in the state. He noted a rise of seizures in cocaine.

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON asked if the data on the 200 overdose deaths breaks out into different types of drugs.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL said the overdose death data touches on all drugs. During the autopsies, he said the deceased were found to have a "cocktail" of drugs within their system. He offered to follow up later and provide information from the medical examiner's office regarding drug overdoses. He agreed to a request by Representative C. Johnson to provide committee members with the total weight of all the possibly fatal doses of fentanyl that were seized in 2022.

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REPRESENTATIVE GROH highlighted Commissioner Cockrell's comment regarding Alaska having a 15 percent decline in crime rate but also the highest rate of domestic violence and sexual assault per capita in the country. He asked what the committee or legislature could do to reduce the rates in the state.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL replied that Alaska is among the top states in the country for rates of violent crime per capita based on 2022 unified crime reports (UCR) data. He addressed the rate of domestic violence and sexual assault, and explained that law enforcement does play a role in addressing those acts, but he said the issue is larger than just law enforcement. He highlighted work the Council on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault has done but stressed that there must be societal change before a real difference is made in the offence rate. He referenced the rates of sexual assault in rural Alaska, and said that between Bethel and the Northwest Arctic Borough, there were over 300 sexual assaults documented.

REPRESENTATIVE GROH noted his own experience as a former prosecutor. He asked Commissioner Cockrell if he has any suggestions on how the legislature could help DPS in getting more certainty of apprehension and successful prosecutions. For example, if there were any adjustments to the budget or state law that could help further that.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL answered that passing new laws or tweaking existing laws right now would not make a huge difference. He suggested that more resources go towards law enforcement agencies and prosecution in certain areas of the state. He explained that, in his experience, cases do get dismissed due to a lack of prosecutors, and he said the Office of the Governor is

addressing the issue. He said his focus is rural Alaska, and stressed that DPS does not have the resources necessary to provide protection to some communities in the state. He said DPS is behind on the power curve, suggested that until the state puts a concentrated effort in rural Alaska, DPS will continue to suffer.

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REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON asked about the state's declining crime rate. He asked if the statistical methodology has changed since 1974.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL replied that the methodology has not changed. He said DPS continues to use UCR for reports to the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and as a data source for yearly reports.

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON asked if the crime data within UCR accounts for cases where an officer was present. He provided an example where a person makes a call only to create a case number for insurance.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL explained that DPS has an online reporting system where an individual can send a report to the local state trooper detachment regarding criminal activity and have a case created. He said UCRs have remained consistent since the 1930s. He spoke on looking at crime overall and advised that the data needs to be viewed in the long term over short term "spikes." He said COVID has affected the crime data.

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON asked if reports sent through the online crime report system feed into FBI data.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL clarified that the crime must meet UCR criteria to be reported. He explained that, in order to decrease the call volume to DPS and its detachments, the online crime report system was created to capture "lower level" crimes for individuals seeking an insurance claim. He said the data from a case sent online would be submitted into UCR.

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON asked if the UCR criteria is publicly available.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL responded that the UCR data is accessible to the public on the Internet, and all 2022 crime data is on the

DPS website. He stressed that the data in UCR only accounts for reported crimes.

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON stressed the difficulty in understanding that, while the crime rate is going down statewide, he still hears about and sees signs of petty crime in his community. He said some of those crimes also go unreported; therefore, he is unsure the crime rate is going down.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL said the visual signs of crime depend on the area individuals live in and how active the local law enforcement agency is. He explained that if the local agency is engaged and responds to every call in the community, then the community will be more apt to report crimes. Conversely, if an agency is overburdened and unable to respond to calls, he said, there is a tendency of lower level crimes going unreported.

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON asked if Commissioner Cockrell could name one law enforcement agency in the state that is not overburdened.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL replied no, "not really."

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REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked how often cases or arrests in the state were dismissed due to a lack of process on law enforcement's part.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL said DPS does not keep track of the number of dismissed cases. He explained that the case is submitted to DOL, regardless if there was an arrest or not. He said DPS submits cases where an arrest was not made based on a legal review of the case prior to charging.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked if the number of cases between DPS and the DOL match. He explained he is seeking "where the problem is breaking down." He said he wants to know the data on why the DA could not prosecute a case. He asked if DPS has data that reflects why a case was dismissed, and whether if DPS does not track that, DOL does.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL said DPS does not collect the data Representative Carpenter is seeking. He said DOL has criteria for screening cases, and part of the decision is whether DPS has enough evidence to convict the individual. He said each community is different, and shared an example from Cordova where

prosecution would not take a driving under the influence (DUI) case on a resident because the jury would not convict.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked if the example Commissioner Cockrell shared is anecdotal, and if there is data supporting that instance.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL confirmed that the example is real. He said in Cordova there was not one DUI case.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER opined on the lack of case data, and stressed that cases not being prosecuted is a problem the legislature needs to better understand. He said he needs data from law enforcement on cases that are going unprosecuted, whether it be due to lack of evidence or a jury problem.

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CHAIR VANCE asked Commissioner Cockrell for the number of sexual assaults reported where the victim seeks a case. She said it is her understanding that often women will be too scared to act against the offender. She asked for the ratio of women who say yes to move forward, and who have a case.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL could not answer but suggested that the question may touch on anonymously submitted sexual assault kits. He said anonymously submitted kits are stored in the evidence locker at DPS indefinitely until the person decides to go forward in the legal process.

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REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD asked what the department understands regarding marijuana laced with fentanyl reaching Alaska. She said her understanding is that fentanyl reaches the state from Mexico and overseas, and asked if marijuana is affected.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL relayed his understanding from drug investigators that DPS has seized marijuana laced with fentanyl. He said fentanyl is primarily produced in China. He outlined the route the drugs go through to reach Alaska: manufactured in China; shipped to Mexico; traveled north through Phoenix, Arizona, Los Angeles, California; and then shipped to Seattle, Washington, before reaching Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE ALLARD asked, since marijuana has become legal in Alaska, whether there has been an uptick in usage by minors.

Further, regarding the black market of marijuana, she asked whether fentanyl is being brought in at the same time.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL explained that fentanyl is primarily coming to the state in pure, pill form. Further, fentanyl has been found laced in other drugs like marijuana. He couldn't answer on whether the state is getting large shipments of marijuana since Alaska is a marijuana state.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL continued to slide 5. He reported 51 new troopers started training in 2022. He said DPS expanded the department's wellness program, which he said provides mental health support for troopers and staff. He shared his hope that a project to equip all state troopers with body worn cameras be completed by the end of the summer. He said the body cameras add transparency to DPS.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY returned to a question posed by Representative Allard. He shared his understanding that, because of the legalization of marijuana in Alaska and the availability of dispensaries, there are checks and balances available now that make buying fentanyl laced marijuana from a licensed dispensary unlikely.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL clarified that the data on slide 5 covers illicit fentanyl and said there is legal fentanyl used for medical purposes. On addressing the likelihood of buying fentanyl laced marijuana at a dispensary, he agreed that the chances are very slim.

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CHAIR VANCE requested Commissioner Cockrell to continue with his presentation.

[2:36:27 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL talked about the Division of Alaska State Troopers on slide 6. He highlighted the Alaska Bureau of Investigation, and said it conducts major crime investigations in the state, as well as financial crime investigations. He explained the division's enforcement of drugs and alcohol and said that most troopers participate in drug task forces across

the state. He pointed to a graphic on slide 6 showing the four Alaska State Trooper detachments and what region each detachment covers: A detachment covers Kenai and Southeast Alaska, B detachment covers the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, C detachment covers Western Alaska, and D detachment covers Interior Alaska.

[2:37:50 PM](#)

CHAIR VANCE asked why there is no detachment on the North Slope.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL said the North Slope Borough has its own police department.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL talked about accomplishments and challenges for the Division of Alaska State Troopers on slide 7. He spoke on the accomplishments and challenges for the division. In comparing 2022 to 2021, he reported that the division seized 215 percent more methamphetamine, 440 percent more fentanyl, 334 percent more heroin, solved 85 percent of homicides within trooper jurisdiction, and expanded the two-on/two-off posts in rural Alaska. As for challenges, he said the division continues to struggle with recruitment and retention and noted that new troopers are being offered a \$20,000 signing incentive. He said the technological changes in how crime is carried out is a challenge. He explained that the importation of drug and alcohol into rural Alaska, and providing adequate housing for troopers in that region, are challenges facing the division.

[2:40:35 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL presented changes of interest in the division's 2024 budget on slide 8. He outlined the requests: digital evidence management software for online evidence management, one or two criminal justice technician(s) for Anchorage, two forensic technicians for Wasilla and Kenai, and expanded internet connectivity in rural posts. He said that once all troopers are outfitted with body worn cameras, adequate Internet connectivity in rural areas will be needed in order to better download data.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL presented the Division of Alaska Wildlife Troopers on slide 9. He said there are 90 wildlife troopers in the state. He explained that wildlife troopers are commissioned

troopers and receive the same training as state troopers. He highlighted that a challenge for the division is managing Alaska's 6,640 miles of coastline, as well as significant hunts and fisheries. Another challenge he pointed to is the complicated regulatory structure while having limited resources. He illustrated the challenge by reporting that there were 891,000 licenses sold and only 90 troopers to provide management statewide in 2022. He noted that the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) has been putting out emergency orders more frequently, and it has been difficult for the public to track the orders.

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CHAIR VANCE asked if the ADF&G hunting app is in real time, and if it could help the public to better follow the regulations.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL said he did not know about the app. He stated that individuals need to know the regulations before going out to hunt or fish.

[2:44:15 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL presented slide 10, which showed a graph on state trooper and VPSO staffing. He reported that within the last two years the department has been able to fill all the open VPSO positions. He said the department has 143 memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreements with villages in the state, but stressed the department only has 65 VPSOs. He corrected the slide, which shows 68 but the number of actual VPSOs is 65. He said the number of MOUs show the importance of the program to rural Alaska.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL described the aircraft and marine sections within DPS while on slide 11. He reported that the department has 44 aircraft in 19 separate bed-down bases. He further reported that the aircraft section had flown 5,667 hours in 2022. He spoke on the department's marine section, and said it operates both large and small vessels. Considering the size of the state's coastline, fisheries, and hunting resources, he said the marine section is a backbone for the Division of Alaska Wildlife Troopers. He said the section's largest vessel is 160 feet in length and is stationed in the Bering Sea. He said the department has put in a budget request to replace the 84-foot vessel P/V Enforcer due to major failures.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL reported the status of the VPSO program in 2022 while on slide 12. He said the program was awarded \$15,207,700 in funds last year. He said the program has 10 grantees and presented a map of Alaska showing where the grantees are located.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL moved to slide 13 to talk about the Public Information Office within the Commissioners office. He reported that the department averages 9,027 record requests each year. Since 2018, the department received 45,135 requests with 29,178 hours logged by staff to fulfill the requests. He advised the committee that the number of requests is expected to increase once body worn cameras are launched, and to address statutory requirements as well as the additional requests for video recordings, he said the department is requesting four staff positions: An information systems coordinator and three criminal justice technicians.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL presented on the Division of Fire and Life Safety while on slide 14. He said the department is requesting resources to hire a deputy fire marshal to serve Southeast Alaska, and said his goal is to also hire a deputy fire marshal for the Kenai Peninsula area.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL moved to slide 15 to outline the responsibilities of the Division of Statewide Support, which includes duties within the Office of the Commissioner, Administrative Services, and Statewide Services. He said when he became commissioner, he had moved components of the Division of Alaska State Troopers and other divisions into the commissioner's office in order to lighten the workload of state troopers. An example he shared was the VPSO program, as it was moved to be under the commissioner's office. He said the department is requesting a full-time director position for the VPSO program. He explained the administrative support services the division is responsible for: central administrative support, grants, finance, budget, procurement, and facilities management. As for statewide support services, he said the division is

responsible for: information systems, Alaska Public Safety Communication Services, criminal justice information systems programs, and the Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL moved to slide 16 to further present on statewide support services. He talked about the Alaska Public Safety Communication Service, a service that provides emergency communication for first responders. He said DPS is where the program belongs after previously being housed under the Department of Administration and the Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs. He reported that the service supported 12,409,758 calls.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL skipped slides 17-19, citing that the information was already discussed earlier in the meeting.

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COMMISSIONER COCKRELL talked about the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in slide 20 and shared that he is a board member. He explained that the goal of the council is to reduce the amount of violence and sexual assaults in the state. He said the council has 11 members, 11 full-time staff, hosts trainings, manages 90 grant awards, and funds 34 community-based agencies. He said the council is implementing a language access plan allowing for online information on what agencies to visit in Alaska's most commonly spoken languages.

[2:54:12 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL presented on slide 21 the Violent Crimes Compensation Board. He said the board exists to alleviate the financial burden victims face following a violent crime. He noted that this was another program DPS had brought in after previously being under the Department of Administration, and reported the board having three staff, three board members, and over 1,000 applications. He said the program started in 1973, and at that time had 15 applications three staff, and three board members. He said DPS is requesting two additional staff positions for the board.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY asked how many staff would be adequate.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL replied that, looking at the national average based on the number of applications received, the department will need to increase staffing. He relayed his concern about the existing two staff positions, as the positions came with no funding. He explained that the program is funded by restorative justice via the permanent fund. He said his fear is that, since the funding is for both staff salaries and the victim's claims, he does not want to reduce claims because of the cost of additional staffing. He shared his hope that the legislature will provide funding to the board.

[2:56:09 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL presented slide 24 on the Alaska Police Standards Council. He explained that the council seeks to produce and maintain a highly trained and positively motivated professional capable of meeting contemporary law enforcement standards of performance. He then presented slide 25 regarding the Council on Human and Sex Trafficking. He said the program is new.

[2:57:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked about the Fire Standards Council. He asked if the requested position Commissioner Cockrell mentioned could help with certification paperwork.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL shared that the requested position is an additional deputy fire marshal and is not related to the council. He shared his understanding that a previous legislature "really did not want" the Alaska Fire Council to be set up like the Police Standards Council and took a staff position from the fire council. Commissioner Cockrell said DPS is working to decrease the time it takes to get certificates out. He said the legislature must decide what direction to take the council.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER said it is his understanding that the Fire Standards Council would be responsible for updating the states standards that firefighters adhere to. Further, he asked if the standards are tied to federal funding, and whether by not having a council, the state would not receive the federal funding.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL said he believes the Fire Standards Council is needed, but said he does not know if having the council is tied to federal funding. If the legislature decides to change statute and makes it so there "shall" be a Fire Standards Council, and funds positions, he said DPS would support that. He said the council is not a mandatory function of DPS.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked if the council falls under DPS.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL confirmed that it does fall under DPS.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked if the committee could have confirmation from DPS that there needs to be a function within the Fire Standards Council in order to maintain certification for firefighters, and whether that function is tied to funding.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL said he could find that out.

[3:01:35 PM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Judiciary Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:01 p.m.