

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 10, 2023

1:31 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Matt Claman, Chair  
Senator Jesse Kiehl, Vice Chair  
Senator James Kaufman  
Senator Cathy Giessel  
Senator Löki Tobin

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CONFIRMATION HEARING:

Commissioner -Department of Corrections  
Jennifer L. Winkelman - Juneau

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

PRESENTATION: DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS OVERVIEW

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

Jennifer Winkelman, Commissioner-Designee  
Department of Corrections  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as Commissioner-Designee for the Department of Corrections and provided the Department of Corrections Overview.

BOBBY DORTON, Reentry Coalition  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in favor of Commissioner-Designee Winkelman.

APRIL WILKERSON, Deputy Commissioner  
Office of the Commissioner  
Department of Corrections  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Responded to questions about the Department of Corrections overview.

ADAM RUTHERFORD, Acting Director  
Division of Health and Rehabilitation Services  
Department of Corrections  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Responded to questions about the Department of Corrections overview.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CHAIR MATT CLAMAN** called the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Kaufman, Giessel, Tobin, Kiehl and Chair Claman.

**CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)**  
**COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS**

[1:31:59 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN announced the consideration of the Confirmation Hearing for Commissioner-Designee Jennifer Winkelman, Department of Corrections.

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JENNIFER WINKELMAN, Commissioner-Designee, Department of Corrections, Juneau, Alaska, directed the committee to her resume. She offered a prepared statement. She was born and raised in Fairbanks, Alaska. Her great grandmother was born in Chicken, Alaska. She graduated from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks with a degree in paralegal studies and injustice. She highlighted participation in an internship at the Fairbanks District Attorney's Office where she learned about work done by probation and parole officers. The internship led to her career as a probation officer.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN informed the committee that she was hired as an entry-level probation officer 22 years ago. During her time as a probation officer, she supervised a variety

of offices throughout the state. She moved to Juneau in 2016 when she accepted the Chief Probation Officer position for Region II. In 2018, she was appointed as the Director of the Division of Pretrial Probation and Parole. She held the position until Governor Dunleavy presented the commissioner opportunity.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN explained to the committee that she values relationships. She is a problem solver and has managed a caseload of felony offenders. She tackles tough decisions fairly and impartially. These skills are critical for the commissioner of the Department of Corrections. She opined that reentry must be treated with the same importance as incarceration. She spoke to the importance of the health and wellbeing of her staff. Healthier staff have a greater systemic impact. She highlighted her goal for inmates to leave the correctional system healthier than they arrived.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN stated that the department saw 18 deaths in 2022: 11 via natural causes and 7 by suicide. She spoke about the increases in suicide seen in correctional facilities. She informed the committee that all newly booked individuals are screened for trauma history and suicide risk. She pointed out that Project 2025 guides suicide prevention within the department. The National Commission on Correctional Healthcare partnered with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention with the goal of reducing suicide by 20 percent by 2025. She mentioned various changes in correctional facilities that allow for better tracking of the vulnerable population. She stressed the importance of community involvement. She stated that she was honored to serve in this critical position.

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SENATOR TOBIN asked about continuing education opportunities for incarcerated individuals.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN responded that the Division of Health and Rehabilitation Services (HARS) managed the education and reentry programs. The division collaborates with other reentry coalitions about education options.

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SENATOR KAUFMAN thanked Commissioner-Designee Winkelman for the recent conversation related to improvement concepts.

SENATOR KIEHL pointed to Commissioner-Designee Winkelman's extensive probation, parole and pretrial experience, but he wondered about her level of expertise with staff challenges.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN responded that she had exposure working in both sentenced and unsentenced facilities. She reported exposure to correction officers along with medical, kitchen and maintenance staff. She prioritized visiting every facility as acting commissioner since May 2022. She sought connection with staff to understand their strengths and struggles. Each facility is different and has unique challenges. She stressed her wish to see people leave the correctional facilities better than they arrived.

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SENATOR KIEHL appreciated hearing about the statewide visits. He asked for an example of a tool that a correctional officer might require, aside from adequate staffing.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN replied that adequate staffing and housing came to mind first. She noted the deficiencies in training opportunities. With a full staff, the department can spare employees for educational opportunities.

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SENATOR GIESSEL stated that she visited with Commissioner-Designee Winkelman earlier in her office and had no further questions.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked Commissioner-Designee Winkelman's perspective on the state's status as a unified correction system. He asked her to explain unified correction systems.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN replied that the distinction lies with having a sentenced and unsentenced population under one roof. She stated that the unsentenced population has a short-time mindset, which leads to less personal investment in the correctional facility. The sentenced population responds differently because the facility is considered a long-term home.

CHAIR CLAMAN understood that state unified systems pertain to a lack of county jails. In other states, the presentenced population is in the county jails.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked if the department experienced recruiting and retention challenges.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN replied that the overall DOC vacancy rate was 13 percent, but some facilities had higher rates than others.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked about prior legislation addressing tablets and computers in prison for the purpose of education and preparation for reentry. He asked how the department perceived similar legislation this session.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN replied that the department continues to support the proposed legislation related to tablets and computers for educational purposes in correctional facilities.

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CHAIR CLAMAN opened public testimony.

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BOBBY DORTON, Reentry Coalition, Fairbanks, Alaska, spoke about his experience with incarceration in Alaska. He explained to the committee that those who arrested him turned out to be his biggest supporters. He stated support for Commissioner-Designee Jennifer Winkelman. He shared that he was released from prison five years ago following an eight-year sentence. He mentioned his work lobbying the legislature for inmate identification (ID) while helping prepare eligible inmates for reentry. He currently works for the Tanana Chiefs Conference creating reentry programs. Additionally, he works as a substance abuse counsellor.

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CHAIR CLAMAN closed public testimony and solicited a motion.

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SENATOR KIEHL stated that in accordance with AS 39.05.080, the Senate Judiciary Committee recommends the appointment be forwarded to a joint session for consideration.

Commissioner -Department of Corrections

Jennifer L. Winkelman - Juneau

CHAIR CLAMAN reminded the committee that signing the reports regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects individual members' approval or disapproval of the appointees; the nominations are merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

**PRESENTATION: DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS OVERVIEW**

[1:58:19 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN announced the consideration of the Department of Corrections overview.

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COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN presented the Department of Corrections Overview. She began with slide 2, "Mission and Core Services."

- Mission: To provide secure confinement, reformative programs, and a process of supervised community reintegration to enhance the safety of our communities
- Department FY2024 Positions: 2,109 PFT
- Department FY2024 Budget Request: \*\$419,410.9

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COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN moved to slide 3, "DOC at a Glance."

- **Alaska is one of seven states that operate a unified correctional system. A state unified system is one in which there is an integrated state-level prison and jail system.**
- **DOC booked 27,748 offenders into its facilities in FY2022**
  - 16,978 were unique offenders
  - 660 were non-criminal Title 47 bookings
- **As of January 1, 2023, DOC was responsible for 10,748 individuals**
  - 4,404 offenders in jail or prison
  - 191 offenders on sentenced electronic monitoring (EM)
  - 339 offenders in community residential centers (CRCs)
  - 3,163 offenders on probation or parole
  - 2,651 defendants on pretrial supervision (1,864 on pretrial EM)

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN continued with slide 4, "Organizational Chart."

- Commissioner's Office

- Division of Institutions
- Division of Health and Rehabilitation Services
- Division of Pretrial, Probation and Parole
- Division of Administrative Services
- Parole Board

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN continued with slide 5, "Division of Institutions."

- Institution Director's Office
  - Inmate Time Accounting
  - Chaplaincy Program
  - Prison Rape Elimination Act Oversight
  - Inmate Grievance Resolution
  - Security Threat Group
- Inmate Transportation and Point of Arrest
  - Inmate Medical Transports
  - Inmate Housing Transports
  - K-9 Unit
  - Point of Arrest
- Classification and Furlough
  - Inmate Classification
  - Inmate Furlough
- 13 Correctional Centers
- 7 Community Residential Centers (CRC)
  - 5 Locations
- 6 Sentenced Electronic Monitoring (EM) Offices
- Out-of-State
  - Medical and Separatee placements

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COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN moved to slide 6, "Facility Capacity." The graph depicts the institutional capacity and jail locations. The yellow bar represents the general capacity, while the red bar represents the maximum capacity. She credited department efforts to operate below the general capacity. She opined that operating at lower capacity contributes to employee and inmate wellness and safety.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked about maximum versus lower-security prison sites.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN replied that Spring Creek and Lemon Creek are the state's maximum-security facilities. Medium facilities include Goose Creek and Wildwood. She pointed out the growing unsentenced population at Goose Creek.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked about structural challenges at the Lemon Creek Facility.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN responded that the Lemon Creek facility had issues with wall cracks due to ground-settling and water damage. Several inmates were relocated to vacant facility beds. She explained to the committee that the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF) oversaw the repair and construction project. She visited the site yesterday and the building is stable, and the drainage problems are resolved. The walls require repair, which is slated for a future project.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked about a possible capital request relating to construction and repair efforts.

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APRIL WILKERSON, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Corrections, Juneau, Alaska, replied that the department submitted a supplemental budget request for \$9.5 million. The supplemental budget request supports the stabilization and construction of the Lemon Creek facility. Conversations with the Division of Risk Management show the promise of another funding source. The engineers report led to additional sources of funding for construction and repairs.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked if Lemon Creek requires a rebuild.

MS. WILKERSON replied that the department sought to avoid new construction for five to fifteen years.

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COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN continued with the presentation and slide 7, "Prison Population by Legal Status." She spoke about the unsentenced prison population. She commented on potential reasons for the increases seen in the unsentenced population. She theorized that law changes, the Covid-19 pandemic, and more serious cases contribute to increases in the unsentenced population.

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COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN pointed to slide 8, "Prison Population by Offense Class." She highlighted that crimes

against a person comprise the largest slice of the pie chart at 28 percent. The chart depicts registerable sex offenses in a separate slice at 18 percent.

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SENATOR KIEHL asked about people with multiple charges in the pie chart designation.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN replied that the most serious crime is shown on the pie chart. She offered the committee additional data upon request.

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COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN moved to slide 9, "Division of Health and Rehabilitation." She explained that the department had a statutory obligation to provide healthcare to offenders in custody. The Health and Rehabilitation Services (HARS) provides timely access to essential care through an evidence-based multidisciplinary approach. The department adheres to guidelines established by the National Commission on Correctional Healthcare (NCCHC). Substance abuse and sex offender programming falls under the HARS umbrella. The reentry unit is also staffed within HARS.

- Health & Rehabilitation Director's Office
  - Medical Oversight
  - Medicaid Assistance
- Physical Health Care
  - Medical
  - Dental
- Behavioral Health Care
  - Mental Health Services
  - Assess Plan Identify & Coordinate (APIC)
  - Institutional Discharge Planning Plus (IDP+)
- Substance Abuse
  - Assessment
  - Residential Treatment
  - Institutional Out-Patient Treatment
- Sex Offender Management
  - Polygraph
  - Institutional Sex Offender Program
  - Community Sex Offender Program
- Domestic Violence Program
  - Batterer's Intervention Program
- Reentry & Recidivism Unit
  - Offender Reentry

- o Community Coordination
- Education/Vocational Programs
  - o Basic Adult Education
  - o Apprenticeship Training
  - o Vocational Training

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SENATOR KIEHL asked about the thorough screening provided at an inmate booking. He asked about the components of the initial screening.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN directed the question to the HARS director.

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ADAM RUTHERFORD, Acting Director, Health and Rehabilitation, Anchorage, Alaska, responded that the department utilized a variety of screening options. Initial screening components include basic healthcare needs, addiction needs, risk of self-harm and other evidence-based screening tools recommended by NCCHC. The screenings identify those with the greatest risk. Many screening tools rely on self-reporting. Medical records are requested from previous providers to corroborate the self-reported data. He mentioned the benefits of the new electronic health record system. He offered to provide the committee with additional details about inmate initial health screens.

SENATOR KIEHL appreciated the offer. He looked forward to reviewing the health screen details.

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COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN continued with slide 10, "Division of Pretrial, Probation and Parole." She spoke about the history of blending the Division of Probation and Parole with the Pretrial Enforcement Division.

- **Probation and Parole Director's Office**
  - o Victim Service Unit
- **Pretrial Services**
  - o Assessments
  - o Supervision
  - o Pretrial Electronic Monitoring
- **Statewide Probation and Parole**
  - o 13 regional locations
  - o Probation Accountability with Certain Enforcement
  - o Pre-Sentencing Unit

- o Interstate Compact
- **15 Regional and Community Jails**
  - o Bristol Bay Borough
  - o City of Cordova
  - o City of Craig
  - o City of Dillingham
  - o City of Haines
  - o City of Homer
  - o City of Kodiak
  - o City of Kotzebue
  - o North Slope Borough
  - o City of Petersburg
  - o City of Seward
  - o City of Sitka
  - o City of Unalaska
  - o City of Valdez
  - o City of Wrangell

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CHAIR CLAMAN asked about the size of community and regional jails.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN responded that many community and regional facilities are quite small while others like Seward and the North Slope Borough are larger and busier.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked if the regional and community jails house the pretrial population exclusively.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN replied yes.

[2:19:58 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN continued with slide 11, "Board of Parole." She highlighted two primary functions of the fully autonomous board. The board points to the commissioner's office. The board's primary functions include processing applications, holding hearings, approving or denying parole, and handling violations.

- **Board of Parole**
  - Discretionary Parole
  - Mandatory Parole
  - Special Medical Parole
  - Geriatric Parole
  - Executive Clemency Program

- **Parole Board Members**
  - Leitoni Matakaiongo Tupou, Chair
  - Sarah Possenti, Vice Chair
  - Steve Meyer, Member
  - Jason Wilson, Member
  - Ole Larson, Member

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COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN moved to slide 12, "Division of Administrative Services." She noted that the division oversees various statewide services.

- **Administrative Services**
  - Budget and Finance
  - Inmate Banking
  - Auditing and Internal Controls
  - Alaska Police Standards Council (APSC)
  - Construction Procurement and Space Liaison
  - Alcohol Ignition Interlock Device Certification
- **Information Technology**
  - Alaska Corrections Offender Management System
  - Inmate Law Library
  - Inmate Technology Support
- **Research and Records**
  - Permanent Fund Dividend Eligibility
  - Determination/Appeals
  - Research and Reporting
  - Criminal Justice Information Security
  - Data Management
  - Web Page
  - Inmate DNA Collections and Tracking
- **Facilities Capital Unit & OSHA Compliance**
  - Management Renovation, Repairs, and
  - Construction Management
  - OSHA Compliance and Oversight

[2:22:11 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN continued with slide 13, "Office of the Commissioner." She highlighted the crucial partnerships related to the training academy.

- **COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE's Office**
  - Constituent Relations
  - Compliance Standards
  - Inmate ADA Grievances
  - Public Information
  - Policy and Procedures
  - Employee Wellness Program
  - Human Resources
  
- **Recruitment and Retention**
  - Recruitment Outreach
  - Applicant Assistance
  - Officer Medical Reimbursement
  - Recruitment Incentive Leave Program
  - Correctional Officer Seniority Tracking
  - Office Of The Commissioner-Designee
  
- **Training Academy**
  - Basic Officer Training
  - Field Officer Training
  - Prisoner Transportation Officer Training
  - Firearm / Taser Training and Certification
  - Municipal Officer Academy
  - Offender Time Accounting
  - Use of Force
  - Methods of Instruction

CHAIR CLAMAN asked about the frequency of the training academy.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN replied that the department offers three correctional training academies a year. Two probation training academies are scheduled annually. The frequency depends on staffing and recruitment.

[2:23:32 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN moved to slide 14, "Positions by Category." She stated that the department faced workforce shortages. She spoke about cultural changes within the facilities. She spoke about solutions including housing incentives, and temporary placement options. She stressed that

retention plays a role in staffing shortages. The incentives are established with retention in mind. She spoke about a new traveling unit created to fill staffing needs and allow employees time off. She detailed the preferred-shift incentives.

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SENATOR KAUFMAN asked for more information about the use of trustees for labor and skill-building purposes.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN replied that the department utilizes the inmate population to perform a variety of stipend jobs. She pointed out that the inmates at the Lemon Creek facility do the laundry for the Alaska Marine Highway System.

[2:28:07 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN asked about the term "trustee" that Senator Kaufman used. He wondered if the term was used in the Alaska Prison System.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN replied no, but she understood the meaning of the term.

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SENATOR KIEHL wondered if filled positions exceed budgeted positions for the medical and mental health category.

MS. WILKERSON replied that the vacancies within the medical and mental health unit were currently filled with private sector providers. She stated that some positions are "double filled," which exceeds the budgeted capacity. Recruitment is a lengthy process and utilizing the "double fill" strategy allows for pending separations or transfers.

SENATOR KIEHL asked about the difficulties or opportunities related to specialized medical and mental health providers.

MS. WILKERSON asked if he was referring specifically to medical and mental health positions.

SENATOR KIEHL replied yes. He repeated the question.

MR. RUTHERFORD responded that health provider recruitment is extremely difficult. He spoke about remaining competitive in an ever-changing world. He stated that most medical professionals prefer working in hospitals to correctional facilities. He complimented his staff for serving the inmate population.

[2:32:48 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN moved to slide 15, "Goals and Objectives."

- Health and Well Being of Staff
- Inmates, Defendants and Probationer/Parolees leave us better than when they entered the system
- Identifying Efficiencies and Resources to Reduce Recidivism

SENATOR TOBIN asked about the department feedback loop. She wondered why the culture shift was necessary.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN responded that she relied heavily on feedback from well-respected sources. She believed that building relationships with reentry coalitions and the Alaska Mental Health Trust would provide additional feedback. She added that staff provide exceptional feedback via exit interviews. She believed that formalizing the exit interview process would help shift the culture further.

[2:37:13 PM](#)

SENATOR KAUFMAN appreciated his recent conversation with Commissioner-Designee Winkelman.

CHAIR CLAMAN asked about visitation suspension during the Covid-19 pandemic. He wondered if inmate visitation had resumed.

COMMISSIONER-DESIGNEE WINKELMAN replied that visitation had resumed, which was beneficial for both inmates and staff.

[2:39:45 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Claman adjourned the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee meeting at 2:39 PM.