

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 4, 2024

1:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Cathy Giessel

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

SENATE BILL NO. 163

"An Act relating to animal adoption and foster care records."

- MOVED CSSB 163 (JUD) OUT OF COMMITTEE

VIOLENT CRIMES COMPENSATION BOARD

Anna Cometa - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

ALASKA POLICE STANDARDS COUNCIL

Ron Dupee - Fairbanks

Jeff Brown - Barrow

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 163

SHORT TITLE: ANIMAL ADOPTION RECORDS

SPONSOR(S) : SENATOR(S) MYERS

01/16/24	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/24
01/16/24	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/24	(S)	JUD
02/09/24	(S)	JUD AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

02/09/24 (S) -- Testimony <Invitation Only> --
02/12/24 (S) JUD AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
02/12/24 (S) Heard & Held
02/12/24 (S) MINUTE (JUD)
03/04/24 (S) JUD AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

BREANNA KAKARUK, Staff
Senator Matt Claman
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the explanation of changes for SB 163.

SENATOR ROBERT MYERS, District Q
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 163 provided closing remarks on the bill.

ANNA COMETA, Appointee
Violent Crimes Compensation Board
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the Violent Crimes Compensation Board.

RON DUPEE, Chief, Appointee
Alaska Police Standards Council
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council.

JAMES COCKRELL, Commissioner
Department of Public Safety
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the discussion of the governor's appointees to the Alaska Police Standards Council.

JEFF BROWN, Chief, Appointee
Alaska Police Standards Council
Utqiagvik, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:30:59 PM](#)

CHAIR MATT CLAMAN called the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Tobin, Kiehl, and Chair Claman. Senator Kaufman arrived immediately thereafter.

SB 163-ANIMAL ADOPTION RECORDS

[1:31:25 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 163 "An Act relating to animal adoption and foster care records."

CHAIR CLAMAN said this is the second hearing of SB 163 in the Senate Judiciary Committee. There is a proposed committee substitute (CS) for SB 163. He invited Ms. Kakaruk to identify herself for the record to present the explanation of changes.

[1:31:43 PM](#)

SENATOR KAUFMAN joined the meeting.

[1:32:06 PM](#)

BREANNA KAKARUK, Staff, Senator Matt Claman, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the explanation of changes, stating the CS deletes "records that include" so that the passage on page 3, lines 30-31, reads:

"names, addresses, or other information identifying a person as adopting or providing foster care for [an animal.]"

MS. KAKARUK said that this change provides the public with as much information as possible while still keeping an individual's personal information private. The CS includes conforming renumbering on page 3.

[1:32:41 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN found no questions and solicited a motion.

[1:32:51 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL moved to adopt the committee substitute (CS) for SB 163, work order 33-LS0978\S, as the working document.

CHAIR CLAMAN found no objection and CSSB 163 was adopted as the working document. He invited Senator Myers to make closing remarks.

[1:33:25 PM](#)

SENATOR ROBERT MYERS, District Q, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, stated that he and the Fairbanks North Star Borough are happy with the committee substitute (CS).

[1:33:42 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN found no questions and solicited the will of the committee.

[1:33:50 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL moved to report CSSB 163, work order 33-LS0978\S, from committee with individual recommendations [and attached fiscal note(s)].

[1:34:01 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN found no objection and CSSB 163(JUD) was reported from the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)
VIOLENT CRIMES COMPENSATION BOARD
ALASKA POLICE STANDARDS COUNCIL

[1:34:23 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN announced the consideration of governor's appointee Anna Cometa to the Violent Crimes Compensation Board, and Ron Dupee and Jeff Brown to the Alaska Police Standards Council.

[1:34:38 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN opened public testimony on the confirmation hearings. He invited Anna Cometa to put herself on the record, provide her background, and give a statement.

[1:35:18 PM](#)

ANNA COMETA, Appointee, Violent Crimes Compensation Board, Anchorage, Alaska, testified as the governor's appointee to the Violent Crimes Compensation Board. She stated her experience includes working as an attorney in the Attorney General's Office for eight years, a magistrate judge in Palmer for two years, and as an attorney in private practice. She said the Office of Victim's Rights approached her and that this appointment is an opportunity to serve and give back. She specialized in crimes against children as a prosecutor and had experience representing the Office of Children Services (OCS). She expressed her interest and passion in serving on the Board having worked with many victims of all ages. She mentioned one goal is to improve the Board's outreach about its services. She said that the Board has improved its website; the site now has an online application and greater online accessibility.

[1:37:56 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN mentioned that the legislature authorized restorative justice funding up to the statutory cap in the FY24 budget to provide additional support services, including a paralegal and an administrative officer. She asked whether those positions had been filled and if the positions provide adequate support to the program.

[1:38:43 PM](#)

MS. COMETA expressed her belief that those positions were filled. She said the positions are instrumental in supporting the Board and in processing applications. She reiterated that a major goal is to process more claims and increase outreach and that these two positions are helping to achieve this goal. She thanked the legislature for its current funding and for consideration of future funding.

[1:40:09 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN asked whether she commuted from Anchorage to Palmer during her time with the Court System in Palmer.

MS. COMETA replied that she commuted from Eagle River when representing OCS through the Attorney General's Office though she spent a significant amount of time in Palmer too. She said that as an assistant attorney general, she worked intensive hours, day and night, even more than private practice. She said Palmer is very dear to her and she is partial to the Mat-Su Valley, which she described as an area in dire need of more judges. She expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve in Palmer as a magistrate judge.

[1:41:56 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN commented that it is impressive how she immediately found another board to serve on after completing service on the previous one. He asked whether she is a partner at the Holmes Weddle & Barcott firm.

MS. COMETA replied that she is an associate. She said she enjoys working for the firm, which does a great deal of work in the community. Although she does not handle criminal, Child in Need of Aid (CINA), or victims' rights cases at the firm, she is now in a better position to engage in community service and serve on the Board.

[1:42:56 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN found no further questions and announced consideration of Ron Dupee, governor's appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council.

[1:43:18 PM](#)

RON DUPEE, Chief; Appointee, Alaska Police Standards Council, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified as the governor's appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council. He is the chief of police with the City of Fairbanks. The governor appointed him to the Alaska Police Standards Council mid-year 2023. He said this is a renewal of that appointment, and he expressed enthusiasm to continue this journey. He said that he has been a law enforcement officer in Alaska since 2003.

[1:44:04 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN clarified that this is a reappointment as opposed to a new appointment.

[1:44:15 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked what major work items are on the Council's agenda.

CHIEF DUPEE expressed his belief that the biggest issue is recruiting and retaining qualified officers. He said that he has ideas for retaining officers and for bringing officers back to the state. He recommended the legislature make certain fixes to the police officer certification, explaining that there is currently no avenue for license suspension. An individual either holds a police standards license or does not. When the Council takes action on a license, the officer may continue to serve throughout the entire process while the matter is resolved in civil court. He said the process needs to be strengthened to allow the Council to suspend a license while it is under review and until a determination is made. He acknowledged the legislature's efforts to improve recruitment and retention through retirement and pension legislation.

[1:46:20 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked whether the legislature currently has any pending legislation related to license suspension.

CHIEF DUPEE expressed his belief that legislation needs to be introduced. The legislature introduced a big package several years ago. There was an issue with size; it did not pass. The Council is working on some language to put forward.

[1:47:07 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN brought up the Alaska Police Standards Council's oversight of certain regulations within the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) Program, specifically recruitment and certification. She asked for his opinion on whether the Council should oversee the program and noted that VPSO certification differs from standard law enforcement officer training and certification.

CHIEF DUPEE expressed his belief that the Council does not certify VPSOs as they operate under a unique program. He clarified that he is not an expert on their recruitment or retention and noted that oversight falls to the State and, he believes, some tribal entities. He said that he is not certain about the training requirements for VPSO certification.

[1:48:58 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN said that she would verify whether the Council establishes the basic standards for the VPSO Program and expressed her understanding that the Council provides the basic framework.

[1:49:21 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN directed the question to Commissioner Cockrell of the Department of Public Safety (DPS) for clarification.

[1:49:37 PM](#)

JAMES COCKRELL, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety, Anchorage, Alaska, replied that the Alaska Police Standards Council does not oversee the VPSO program; DPS oversees it. The Council certifies village police officers (VPOs), who are distinct from VPSOs, as well as regular law enforcement officers.

[1:50:33 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN brought up SB 88, legislation that proposes to return the State of Alaska to a defined benefits retirement plan. He asked whether the Fairbanks Police Department has taken a position on the bill and whether Chief Dupee holds a personal position on it.

CHIEF DUPEE replied that he has not reviewed SB 88 in its entirety. He expressed his belief that a defined benefits retirement program would go a long way to resolve law enforcement's recruitment and retention problem in Alaska. Nationwide, there is a shortage of applicants for police officer positions; moreover, the absence of a defined benefit retirement system makes it more difficult to attract officers, as such

benefits are available elsewhere. He said Alaska is missing out on these recruits, so the Fairbanks Police Department is in support of SB 88 for law enforcement and emergency medical services personnel.

[1:52:22 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN found no further questions for Chief Dupee. He announced consideration of Chief Jeff Brown, governor's appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council.

[1:52:35 PM](#)

JEFF BROWN, Chief; Appointee, Alaska Police Standards Council, Utqiagvik, Alaska, testified as the governor's appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council. He said that he is the North Slope Borough Chief of Police and a current member of the Alaska Police Standard Council. He said that he is deeply honored to be before the committee as a nominee for confirmation and continued service with the Council. He is a dedicated advocate for the justice, safety, and well-being of the community. He is committed to upholding the highest standards of professionalism and integrity within law enforcement. He said that he has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to public service and a passion for fostering positive relationships between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve.

CHIEF BROWN expressed his belief that effective policing requires collaboration, transparency, and accountability at every level. He pledged to approach his responsibilities with diligence, fairness, and a steadfast commitment to the principles and equity of justice. He expressed eagerness to contribute his skills, experience, and perspective to the important work of the Council. He thanked the committee for its consideration.

[1:53:46 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN asked how long he served on the Council.

CHIEF BROWN said that this is his second term; recalling that the governor initially appointed him two or three years ago.

[1:54:01 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked what major issues are on the Council's agenda for the upcoming term that were not addressed by the previous appointee.

CHIEF BROWN replied that one item is creating an administrative certification for law enforcement professionals. Currently,

there are intermediate and advanced certifications. The Council has discussed administrative officer pathways and training for first-line supervision, middle management, and upper management certifications.

CHIEF BROWN said another item on the list is establishing intermediate and advanced certifications for corrections staff. The certifications would mirror that of law enforcement, providing additional training opportunities and other related advantages.

CHIEF BROWN said that an issue he anticipates emerging is the Council's prohibition on marijuana use by sworn and certified law enforcement and correctional officers. He stated that the Council should reexamine its policy and consider adjustments, given that Alaskans voted to legalize marijuana. He expects that the Council will review other issues raised by the previous appointee.

[1:56:33 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN asked whether he had a position on legislation that would return the State of Alaska to a defined benefits retirement plan, and how such legislation might affect employees of the Department of Public Safety (DPS).

CHIEF BROWN replied that he supports that legislation. He said that he was fortunate the State hired him almost 18 years ago when there was a defined benefit retirement program. That legislation has its advantage for law enforcement recruitment and retention and is necessary to stay competitive. It is another tool in the toolbox to attract law enforcement and other public service providers to the state.

[1:57:48 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN said that there is a third governor's appointee for consideration to the Alaska Police Standards Council scheduled for a hearing later.

CHAIR CLAMAN opened public testimony on the governor's appointees to the Violent Crimes Compensation Board and the Alaska Police Standards Council. Finding none, he closed public testimony.

CHAIR CLAMAN found no further questions or comments from committee members and solicited a motion.

[1:58:50 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL stated [that in accordance with AS 39.05.080,] the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee reviewed the following and recommends the appointments be forwarded to a Joint Session for consideration:

Violent Crimes Compensation Board

Anna Cometa - Anchorage

Alaska Police Standards Council

Ron Dupee - Fairbanks

Jeff Brown - Utqiagvik

Signing the reports regarding appointments to boards and commissions does not reflect an intention by any member to vote for or against these individuals for any further sessions for purposes of confirmation.

[1:59:13 PM](#)

CHAIR CLAMAN announced the committee would advance the names to a Joint Session.

[1:59:29 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Claman adjourned the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee meeting at 1:59 p.m.