

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

January 28, 2025

8:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Rebecca Himschoot, Co-Chair
Representative Donna Mears, Co-Chair
Representative Carolyn Hall
Representative Ky Holland
Representative Mike Prax
Representative Justin Ruffridge

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW: DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JEN WINKELMAN, Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Corrections
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave an overview of the Department of Corrections.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the Department of Corrections overview.

JAKE WYCKOFF, Deputy Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner
Department of Corrections

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the Department of Corrections overview.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:00:27 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DONNA MEARS called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Representatives Prax, Hall, Holland, Himschoot, and Mears were present at the call to order. Representative Ruffridge arrived as the meeting was in progress.

OVERVIEW: Department of Corrections

[8:01:37 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS announced that the only order of business would be an overview of the Department of Corrections (DOC).

[8:03:11 AM](#)

JEN WINKELMAN, Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Corrections (DOC), presented a PowerPoint, titled "Department of Corrections" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. She shared the department's mission and core services: secure confinement, supervised release, and reformative programs. Alaska is one of seven states that operate a unified correctional system, meaning a system in which the state-level prison and jail systems are integrated. In response to a series of questions from Co-Chair Himschoot regarding community jails, she explained that the legislature established a community jail system that falls under DOC in communities without a state facility. The community jails are used to hold individuals for short stays before transferring them to a state facility. She explained that a working group was formed to redraft the community jail contracts, which will be fully effective by July 1, 2025.

[8:10:38 AM](#)

APRIL WILKERSON, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Corrections (DOC), in response to a series of committee questions, explained that part of the contract reevaluation was to establish budget parameters to ensure consistency between each of the community jails for

allowable costs. If there were shortfalls, she assured the committee that they could be made whole through a supplemental budget.

[8:14:42 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER WINKELMAN resumed the presentation with a look at DOC by the numbers. In FY 24, DOC book 26,998 offenders into its facilities, of which 16,868 were unique offenders; as of January 1, 2024, DOC was responsible for just under 9,767 individuals. She shared the department's organizational structure and highlighted its major accomplishments in FY 24: a jail-based restoration program in partnership with the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS) and the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API), the expansion of community placement options, and a system-wide effort to improve outcomes and close gaps on suicide prevention, a pre-apprentice carpentry program with the Carpenter's Union, a pilot tablet program, and a peer support team within DOC's statewide wellness program. In response to committee questions, she differentiated between court tablets and the pilot tablet program. Tablets were loaned by the Alaska Court System (ACS) to be utilized for court hearings, whereas the pilot program is used for individual programming.

[8:28:56 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER WINKELMAN segued to the department's key challenges, including the recruitment and retention of qualified staff, management and movement of the offender population, controlling the cost and prevalence of chronic illnesses and disease among incarcerated offenders, and reducing the ongoing deterioration of facilities. In response to a series of questions from Co-Chair Mears, she acknowledged the lack of community resources and the difficulty of hiring professionals to treat these individuals. She expressed her hope that the use of tablets and telehealth would widen the available options.

[8:33:54 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER WINKELMAN detailed the Division of Institutions, which provides secure confinement with an emphasis on public safety and starts the process of programming and community integration. In response to questions, she said currently, out-of-state placements are only used for serious medical treatments, prior law enforcement, and individuals that cannot be housed with anyone else. She acknowledged that it's more

expensive to house within the state of Alaska; however, the increase in jobs is an added benefit, as well as the incarcerated individuals' proximity to family. She touted the two K-9 units in Southcentral Alaska that have a wide variety of uses.

[8:40:04 AM](#)

JAKE WYCKOFF, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Corrections (DOC), spoke to the K-9 units, which are trained to detect institutional contraband, such as alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco. The K-9 units are used to conduct targeted searches within the institutions and halfway houses.

[8:41:22 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER WINKELMAN emphasized that all DOC facilities are currently below capacity as of Jan 1, 2025, which contributes to safer facilities and staff wellness. However, under capacity does not mean there is available space.

MS. WILKERSON, in response to a question from Co-Chair Himschoot, she said the Lemon Creek renovations should be completed by the end of March 2025; final inspections and occupancy target the end of April and full operations are expected by July 1, 2025. She added that DOT&PF is overseeing the project and expects to see an extension of life expectancy by 10-12 years from this investment, which totals \$12 million.

[8:48:01 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER WINKELMAN resumed the presentation with a breakdown of DOC's sentenced and un-sentenced prison population by gender and offense class. In response to committee questions, she agreed that the goal is to move individuals through pre-trial facilities quickly; however, various delays cause individuals to remain in an unsentenced status for years. She reported that there are approximately 130 federal inmates housed in DOC facilities.

[9:01:38 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:01 a.m.