

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 30, 2025

8:01 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 PUBLIC SAFETY

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JAMES COCKRELL, Commissioner
Department of Public Safety
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of the Department of Public Safety.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:01:59 AM](#)

CHAIR DONNA MEARS called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at [8:01] a.m. Representatives Hall, Holland, Himschoot, and Mears were present at the call to order. Representatives Prax and Ruffridge arrived as the meeting was in progress.

OVERVIEW: Department of Public Safety

CO-CHAIR MEARS announced that the only order of business would be an overview of the Department of Public Safety.

[8:04:03 AM](#)

JAMES COCKRELL, Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Public Safety (DPS), presented a PowerPoint, titled "Department of Public Safety Overview" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. He shared the department's mission and key objectives, including recruitment, retention, and wellness; rural Alaska law enforcement; establishing parks; purchasing long-range aircraft; illicit drug and child abuse investigations; and fisheries and wildlife resource protection.

[8:16:32 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL, in response to committee questions, acknowledged the gaps within DPS and said crime levels and resource allocation are two examples of performance indicators; statewide drug units interface with law enforcement in Western states to combat drug trafficking from Mexico; and a Ferry ride-along program was successfully used as a test case to deter drugs from entering Alaska through the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS).

[8:28:50 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL resumed the presentation with an explanation of the department's organizational chart. He emphasized the importance of maintaining a degree of separation from the state crime lab to maintain the appearance of impropriety when evidence is tested. He gave a summary of the Alaska State Troopers' (AST) history.

[8:36:08 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL, in response to committee questions, said aside from drug enforcement, AST does not patrol the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA); the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Kenai Peninsula Borough, and the Fairbanks North Star Borough are without police power, leaving AST to handle those jurisdictions; and there is no mechanism for MOA to contract with AST.

[8:41:37 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL resumed the presentation by sharing the department's following successes:

- Since 2018 overall crime rate has decreased 37% and drug seizures have increased 733%
- Number of felony sex offenses has decreased 27% statewide (2023 to 2024)
- No backlog of sexual assault examination kits awaiting testing at the Alaska Crime Lab
- 2024: established online system for victims of sexual assault to track their sexual assault examination kit
- 2024: the Alaska State Troopers (AST) awarded as the US Postal Services National Exemplary partner after AST was identified as the most productive law enforcement agency in the country working with USPS to interdict drugs
- Troopers seized 1,262 pounds of illegal narcotics across the state including approximately 42 million potentially fatal doses of fentanyl in 2024

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL gave an overview of the Division of the Alaska State Troopers (AST) and its four detachments. In response to committee questions, he said the North Slope Borough has its own police department, for which AST offers technical support and additional assistance for homicides. He resumed the presentation with graphics on Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) and the Statewide Drug/Alcohol Enforcement Unit, noting that there has been an increase in alcohol seizures in western and northern Alaska. In response to committee questions, he acknowledged that crime is down, but declined to attribute it to an increase in funding.

[8:51:09 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL resumed the presentation with an overview of drug seizures in 2023 and 2024. He confirmed that more resources have been put towards drug interceptions to combat the high volume of drugs entering Alaska.

[8:56:34 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at [8:56] a.m.