

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE
February 13, 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(S): DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

- HEARD

OVERVIEW: DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

JAMES COCKRELL, Commissioner
Department of Public Safety
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the Department of Public Safety overview.

COLONEL BRIAN BARLOW, Director
Division of Alaska Wildlife Troopers
Department of Public Safety
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the Department of Public Safety overview.

LAUREL SHOOP, Legislative Liaison
Department of Public Safety
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Played two videos depicting an aircraft rescue and the VPSO program.

LISA PURINTON, Director
Division of Statewide Services
Department of Public Safety
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the Department of Public Safety overview.

DAVID KANARIS, Chief of Forensic Laboratories
Division of Statewide Services
Department of Public Safety
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the Alaska Crime Lab.

MARYBETH GAGNON, Director
Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
Department of Public Safety
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

JEN WINKELMAN, Commissioner
Department of Corrections
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the Department of Corrections overview.

TRAVIS WELCH, Director
Division of Health and Rehabilitation Services
Department of Corrections
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on the Division of Health and Rehabilitation Services.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:01:05 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:01 a.m.

Representatives Hall, Holland, Mears, and Himschoot were present at the call to order. Representatives Prax and Ruffridge arrived as the meeting was in progress.

OVERVIEW(S): Department of Public Safety

[8:02:27 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT announced that the first order of business would be a continuation of the Department of Public Safety overview.

[8:02:57 AM](#)

JAMES COCKRELL, Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Public Safety (DPS), resumed a PowerPoint, titled "Department of Public Safety Overview" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. He offered information on the Alaska Bureau of Investigations (ABI) and the Division of Alaska Wildlife Troopers (AWT). In response to committee questions, he confirmed that Figure 2 in the document, titled "Department of Public Safety Follow-Up" [included in the committee packet] includes wildlife troopers in the 411 budgeted trooper positions in 2025. In reference to Figure 4, he said the increase in crime from 2014 to 2021 was impacted by Senate Bill 91 and a spike in theft and drug offenses. The AWT focuses on Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADFG) regulations and supplements criminal patrols when the department is short staffed. Search and rescue has also been delegated to AWT because the division has the appropriate resources to perform those duties and lessen the Alaska State Troopers' (AST) load.

[8:22:40 AM](#)

COLONEL BRIAN BARLOW, Director, Division of Alaska Wildlife Troopers (AWT), Department of Public Safety (DPS), reported that AWT averages a 5 percent citation rate based on the number of compacts.

[8:23:23 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL discussed the Aircraft Section, which includes a fleet of 49 fixed wing and rotor wing aircraft based in 19 locations with 6,141 hours flown in calendar year (CY) 2024. The aircraft are used for prisoner transport, search and rescue, wildlife resource protection, and general law enforcement response/investigations. In response to committee

questions, he said the aircraft are utilized strategically and are "mission critical." He noted that several of the aircraft would be sold in the next year to downsize.

[8:32:00 AM](#)

LAUREL SHOOP, Legislative Liaison, Department of Public Safety (DPS), narrated a video of an aircraft rescue in Fairbanks.

[8:35:34 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL gave an overview of the Marine Section and its fleet of 41 vessels. In response to committee questions, he said the department receives federal funding for offshore fisheries patrol from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). He said the Marine Section's mission, which differs from the Coast Guard, is to enforce ADFG laws within territorial waters. He acknowledged that there is a partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard for drug interdictions, but the state has limited authority to search a vessel without a warrant. The larger vessels are run and maintained by civilians with a minimum of two troopers on board to supplement enforcement.

[8:44:51 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL continued the presentation with a discussion of the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) Division.

[8:49:45 AM](#)

MS. SHOOP played a video about the VPSO Division that showed the communities in which they serve and the importance of the program.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL shared an anecdotal example, emphasizing the need for a higher level of law enforcement in rural Alaska. He resumed the presentation with an overview of the Division of Fire and Life Safety, detailing its mission, fiscal year 2024 (FY 24) accomplishments and challenges, and the Statewide Support section, which includes the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS), Alaska Police Standards Council (APSC), and Alaska Public Safety Communication Services (APSCS).

[9:02:17 AM](#)

LISA PURINTON, Director, Division of Statewide Services, Department of Public Safety (DPS), in response to a committee question about access to fingerprinting options in rural Alaska for noncriminal justice purposes, said virtual instruction is available and the division works with the accessible resources in each community.

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL resumed the presentation by addressing the APSCS, which supports first responders with the Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR). He acknowledged that there are dead zones across the state, but his goal is to stand up a new tower every year. In response to a follow up question, he confirmed that satellite phones and cell phones can be used in dead zoned. He discussed Information Services under Statewide Support and its accomplishments, including an Online Criminal History Request portal, deployment of Starlink devices to improve bandwidth, and continued extensive work with the CJIS program and several vendors as part of a project to modernize the state's databases.

[9:12:09 AM](#)

MS. PURINTON further detailed the CJIS program, which manages the state's criminal history repository, sex offender registry, concealed handgun permits, and "hot file" records, and its accomplishments.

[9:15:06 AM](#)

DAVID KANARIS, Chief of Forensic Laboratories, Division of Statewide Services, Department of Public Safety (DPS), detailed the Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory's ("Alaska Crime Lab") core services: Forensic analysis, breath alcohol testing, training and education, and forensic science hit outcome programs. He noted that the lab's forensic scientists testified over 90 times in 2024 across the state. He confirmed that the crime lab has sufficient resources to address the workload with three new trained analysts and a cleared backlog of cases.

[9:21:30 AM](#)

MARYBETH GAGNON, Director, Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA), Department of Public Safety (DPS), gave an overview of the council, its mission, and its accomplishments and challenges. In response to committee questions about the working relationship between the council and the Department of Corrections (DOC), she said statutes for perpetrator rehabilitation programming are under DOC statutes. There is a

memorandum of understanding that the CDVSA will approve and monitor the program and receives inner-agency receipts from DOC to conduct its work. She confirmed that the funding received through U.S. Senator's Murkowski's earmark is going away, and the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding is diminishing each year. She further reported that there would be a 39 percent cut to the federal FY 25 awards, which follows a 37 percent cut in FY 24.

[9:27:47 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER COCKRELL concluded the presentation with an overview of the Violent Crimes Compensation Board, its accomplishment, and its challenges.

[9:32:34 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:32 a.m. to 9:34 a.m.

OVERVIEW: Department of Corrections

[9:34:42 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT announced that the final order of business would be a continuation of the Department of Corrections Overview.

[9:35:25 AM](#)

JEN WINKELMAN, Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Corrections (DOC), resumed the PowerPoint presentation, titled "Department of Corrections" [hard copy included in the committee packet] and acknowledged that the department works in tandem with DPS.

[9:37:49 AM](#)

TRAVIS WELCH, Director, Division of Health and Rehabilitation Services, Department of Corrections (DOC), gave an overview of the Division of Health and Rehabilitation Services, which is statutorily required to provide timely access to essential healthcare for offenders. In response to a series of committee questions, he spoke to the working relationship between DOC and other state departments, like DOH and DFCS. He explained that many individuals entering DOC's care and custody with a substance use disorder (SUD) transfer to providers outside the system, and DOC assessments help track that data. Prioritizing

treatment slots is often determined by the payer, like Medicaid, which places a lower priority on individuals in DOC custody. Medicaid's inmate exclusion clause applies to those being housed within a facility; however, people in inpatient programs and community residential centers can bill Medicaid for those services. He reported that failure to provide medical services to an incarcerated individual violates the Eighth Amendment, and said screening, training experience, and prior knowledge are used to determine whether individuals entering the facilities are at risk for withdrawal.

[10:01:22 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:01 a.m.