

Anchorage Reentry Coalition
Quarterly Meeting Minutes
1/23/20

Representatives in attendance from the following organizations/groups: Alaska Nations Reentry Group (ANRG); Alaska Department of Corrections; Native Men's Wellness Program, Southcentral Foundation; Alaska Housing Finance Corporation; Recover Alaska; Running Free Alaska; YWCA Alaska; Anchorage Community Mental Health Services; Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center; Partners Reentry Center; Family Wellness Warriors Initiative, Southcentral Foundation; Alaska Native Justice Center; ONE2ONE Mentorship Program; Hard Knocks; U.S. Probation; Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention, Alaska DHSS; Alaska National Guard, Counterdrug Support Program; Public Defender Agency; Anchorage Assembly; Alaska Department of Labor; Food Bank of Alaska; Alaska Correctional Officers Association; Akeela; KTVA; Office of Rep. Zack Fields.

1. Introductions.

2. Presentation: Rep. Zack Fields (via phone).

Rep. Fields spoke about HB 187, the bill he is sponsoring that would prohibit sending inmates out of state or to private prisons. The bill will be discussed today [Jan. 23rd] at the House State Affairs Committee. Additional public testimony can be offered on Tuesday Jan. 28th. Rep. Fields expressed optimism that it will be passed and then sent on to the House Finance Committee. It was suggested that if you are represented by someone that is on the House Finance Committee, it may be worth reaching out to them to share your perspective on the bill. Rep. Fields expressed optimism for being able to pass this bill as people are aware of the topic of private prisons and the matter is being discussed among members of the legislature. You may contact the office of Rep. Fields if you are interested discussing ways to advocate for the bill and this issue.

3. Information Sharing: Jonathan Pistotnik (Reentry Coalition).

Mr. Pistotnik provided additional context to the information provided by Rep. Fields. The State of Alaska issued a Request For Proposal seeking bids to house 500 or more male inmates. Mr. Pistotnik shared his concern for this proposed measure.

4. Presentation: Assembly Chairman Felix Rivera (Anchorage Assembly).

Assembly Chairman Rivera explained how he became involved in this issue and how it was brought to his attention. Mr. Rivera also explained that there has been a history of opposition to the use of private prisons in Alaska. Mr. Rivera has explored ways that the Anchorage Municipality could outright ban the use of private prisons and oppose their use. Since the Department of Corrections utilizes a unified system [prisons and jails operated by a single government agency, rather than splitting oversight between state and local jurisdictions] the Alaska Legislature has the ability to ban the use of private prisons, but the Municipality does not. The Municipality does pay 2.5-3.0 million dollars annually to the Department of Corrections, but it cannot directly control the use of private prisons unlike other jurisdictions that do have locally operated jails.

An alternative strategy was to pass a strongly worded resolution stating that the Anchorage Assembly does not approve of the use of private prisons nor sending inmates out of state. Mr. Rivera pointed out that Alaska had done this in the past, and because it did not have positive results the practice was stopped. The resolution was passed by the Assembly on a 10-1 vote on Dec. 17, 2019. Mr. Rivera

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expressed his support for both HB 187 and the companion bill being offered in the Senate by Sen. Elvi Gray-Jackson.

5. Presentation: Josh Wilson (Alaska Correctional Officers Association).

Mr. Wilson expressed his concern that sending inmates out of state will harm Alaska and Alaskans, and will fail Alaska again if implemented. Mr. Wilson shared some of the history and timeline of events relating to this latest effort to send inmates out of state, including that the legislature had previously allocated \$16.6 million to re-open the Palmer Correctional Center. Currently, there are no known efforts by the Department of Corrections to re-open and staff Palmer Correctional Center.

Mr. Wilson explained that the RFP seeking bids for prison beds set low standards that were not equal to the in-state standards that corrections staff and the Department abide by, including supervision, accreditation, and rehabilitation. Mr. Wilson explained that there are existing studies that have demonstrated that private prisons do not always result in cost-savings, nor do they necessarily provide better security or safety. It was added that the Federal government has put restrictions on incarcerating people more than 500 miles from their home.

It was stated that Goose Creek Prison was built, at least in part, to be able to return out of state inmates back to Alaska. Mr. Wilson stated that prison gang activity increased after men were brought back from out of state, and some of this gang activity transcended into the community and lead to new crimes. Mr. Wilson expressed his sentiment that when inmates return to the community after release they should be prepared to successfully integrate into the community.

Mr. Wilson also explained ways that private prison companies attempt to demonstrate cost savings. One strategy is that oftentimes private prisons only accept healthy inmates and do not take those with serious medical conditions, thereby minimizing healthcare costs that would otherwise be the responsibility of the private prison company. Certain inmates (like those with a sex offender charge) that require higher degrees of supervision are not accepted and looser supervision rules can lead to lower staffing levels; these strategies minimize staff costs. There are also contractual strategies that may minimize certain private prison expenditures, such as certain administrative costs, travel costs, and certain health-care costs.

Mr. Wilson explained that the Department of Corrections does not have a dedicated budget for recruitment and advertising job openings for hiring new corrections officers and staff, which may help explain why recruitment and staffing levels are low. Mr. Wilson also expressed his belief that with modest efforts and funding, at least portions of Palmer Correctional Center could be made operational relatively quickly. Mr. Wilson expressed his support for the bills being offered by Rep. Fields and Sen. Gray-Jackson that address the issue.

[More information can be found here: <https://protectingalaska.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ACOA-Private-Prisons-Book-vOnline.pdf>]

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6. Presentation: Jonathan Pistotnik (Anchorage Reentry Coalition).

Mr. Pistotnik presented information regarding the connection between the sending of prison inmates out of state, the U.S. Census, and potential negative impacts on states. He explained that in the past Alaska had sent men out of state to Arizona, specifically to the town of Eloy, Arizona, where Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) operates 4 private facilities. It was explained that when the U.S. Census is conducted, prison inmates are included in the U.S. Census, however the policy is to be counted where they are physically incarcerated. As an example, it was stated that even if an individual is a resident of Alaska but is incarcerated in a prison in Arizona at the time of the U.S. Census, that person would be counted in the Arizona population rather than Alaska. It was explained that there are more than 130 Federal programs that utilize U.S. Census data to allocate funding to states, and that under the previous example, Arizona would potentially gain Federal funding allocations for certain programs and Alaska would lose out on funding allocations. Mr. Pistotnik explained that Federally funded programs that utilize Census data include Medicaid, SNAP program, Federal Pell Grant Program, Highway Planning and Construction, Section 8 Housing Vouchers, National School Lunch Programs, and numerous other public safety, social safety net programs. It was explained that many of the same programs that utilize U.S. Census data would benefit many of the low-income individuals and families that are overly represented in the criminal justice system.

7. Presentation: Olivia Garrett (YWCA Alaska).

Ms. Garrett provided an overview of services and programs offered at the YWCA Alaska, in Anchorage. Most services are for women, but men and non-gender conforming people can access some services if they otherwise qualify. The Women's Wellness Program offers breast and cervical cancer screenings through the Ladies First Program for qualifying women, provides information and referrals regarding tobacco cessation and the Alaska Tobacco Quit Line, provides diabetes prevention and testing services, and has patient navigators that can help minimize or eliminate barriers to access healthcare services (e.g. arrange transportation, language interpreters, appointment scheduling assistance, etc.).

The Economic Empowerment Program assists with employment navigation, financial literacy, individual counseling. Employment navigation services can help those with a criminal background, assist with legal questions, job search etiquette, and provide guidance for job seekers. Financial literacy assistance is offered both in group settings and on an individual-basis at the YWCA or in the community (upon request), and can include money management, banking, credit and debt, and financial exploitation. Generally, services are offered to those +15 years old and all genders are available to receive these services. People of all income levels are eligible, but the program does make an effort to engage a portion of clients that also qualify as Mental Health Trust Beneficiaries. Services are available at the Job Labs at the Anchorage Libraries 2-5 PM (Mountain View on Tuesdays, Loussac Library on Wednesdays, Muldoon Library on Fridays).

The YWCA Alaska also offers advocacy and civic engagement services. Services are available for people that have been incarcerated and may have questions regarding voter registration, voting rights information, candidate information. [Presentation is available upon request]

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8. General Discussion & Updates.

Chet Adkins (SCF) – Mr. Adkins spoke in response to the information that was shared regarding the use of private prisons and sending men out of state; Mr. Adkins spent 18 years at out of state prisons. Mr. Adkins stated that staff compensation is low at private prisons which can facilitate corruption, and that Native Alaskans were over-represented among those that were sent out of state. Mr. Adkins stated that predatory gangs did not exist in Alaska prior to inmates being sent out of state, and expressed concern that if happens again that it will extend and influence activities in both urban and rural communities. Mr. Adkins strongly expressed his belief that these issues should be discussed publicly, rather than ignored or discussed in private settings.

Eve Van Dommelen (Food Bank of Alaska) – Ms. Van Dommelen explained that some changes have occurred to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in Alaska. For 15 years there had been a waiver that was in place that had eased work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents, but starting Oct. 1, 2019 the current State administration requested that the waiver be amended so that only areas with unemployment rates of 10% or more could continue to waive the work requirements. There are situations where individuals are now being subjected to the work requirement rules, with more people being impacted starting Feb. 1. There are clients that are reporting losing benefits and they are unclear as to why it is happening. The SNAP Outreach Team is available to take questions from clients regarding SNAP eligibility, benefits, and the new work requirements, and can also help navigate potential new clients through the sign-up process. [More information can be found here: <http://alaskasnap.com/>]

Molly Mattingly (Recover Alaska) – Ms. Mattingly explained that the Anchorage Assembly is considering a new 5% retail sales tax on alcohol in the Municipality of Anchorage, and that Recover Alaska has intimately involved in that effort. January 28th is the next opportunity to provide testimony on the proposed tax at the next Anchorage Assembly meeting. Ms. Mattingly explained some of the reasons why the effort may not have passed the previous year, and how efforts differ this time. The proposed tax revenue would be used for positions and services for first responders and police; addressing domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault; and providing homeless and substance treatment and prevention services. Recover Alaska maintains an email list to keep people apprised of updates. [More information can be found here: <https://recoveralaska.org/>]

Julie McDonald (Alaska Native Justice Center) – Announced that ANJC was awarded a new grant, and will be implementing a new youth-focused program in collaboration with the McLaughlin Youth Center.

Bob Churchill & Joel Forbes (Alaska Native Reentry Group) – Mr. Churchill reported that he was hearing reports that nearly 50% of individuals inside DOC facilities had not yet been convicted and expressed his concern for the issue. Mr. Churchill, along with Joel Forbes, Second Chief of the ANRG announced their recent discovery of an app that they had found called Yugtun, which is a phone app to help one learn and understand the Yupik language.

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Judge Stephanie Rhoades (ONE2ONE Mentorship Program) – Ms. Rhoades expressed concern regarding the frequent cycling of individuals charged with misdemeanors through the criminal justice system and correctional institutions, and explained that in those instances, individuals do not receive opportunities to program or receive services. Ms. Rhoades expressed concern regarding providing reentry services or programming only to those that have been convicted, but restricting availability of services to those individuals that may not have been convicted but are still engaged in the criminal justice system.

Janet McCabe (Partners For Progress) – Ms. McCabe suggested that the reentry simulations should incorporate and reflect reentry services that currently exist to support people returning to the community.

Demetria Veasy (DOLWD Midtown Job Center) – Upcoming job fairs include the 2020 Anchorage City-Wide Job and Career Fair at the University Center (Feb. 21). CTC will be holding a job fair at the Northway Mall (believed to be on March 28). The Travel and Tourism Job Fair will be at the airport (March 28). The Employment First Job Fair will be April 3. The Reentry Job Fair is still being planned, but updates will be shared as details emerge.

There was some discussion regarding pursuit of the Ban the Box efforts in Anchorage/Alaska. Barbara Dunham from the Alaska Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC) stated that several years ago there was an effort to study this approach by the ACJC. It was determined that the research was fairly new and that there were some studies that suggested that there were actually some negative repercussions associated with Ban the Box. As a result it was the recommendation of the ACJC to not pursue that strategy until more research was available on the matter. Ms. Rhoades stated that if one is interested in advocating use of the strategy, the ACJC does accept public testimony and the next meeting will be January 30th in Juneau (calling in is an option).

Jonathan Pistotnik (Anchorage Reentry Coalition) - The Reducing Recidivism and Reentry Conference is Feb. 19 & 20; there will be a reentry simulation at the conference. ~~The Equity and Justice Luncheon will be held on Feb. 8[#] at the Egan Center.~~ In a subsequent communication after the meeting, it was announced that this event has been postponed.

**Next Quarterly Coalition Meeting:
April 23rd at the NeighborWorks Alaska Office, from 9:30am-11am.**

**Please Contact the Coalition Coordinator if You Would Like To Make A
Presentation to the Reentry Coalition.**