

## ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR

**AJJAC's Mission:**

- To provide support, advice and guidance to the government and citizens of the State of Alaska, in accordance with the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act.
- To help reduce and prevent juvenile crime, while ensuring that Alaska's youth are provided meaningful opportunities to succeed.

**Inside the Report:**

- **Fairbanks Youth Facility Renovations**
- **Serious Crimes by Young Offenders**
- **Technology Access in Facilities**

**Committee Members:**

Gorn, Amy (Wasilla)  
Chair

Michaelson, Ray (Palmer)  
Vice-Chair

Zapata, Omaly (Anchorage)  
Secretary

Barry, Connor (Soldotna)  
Biel, Simon (Anchorage)  
Budd, Jeffrey (Sitka)  
Jeffery, Michael (Barrow)  
Kokrine, Beverly (Fairbanks)  
Manzie, Ernest (Fairbanks)  
Maxwell, Dave (Palmer)  
Morse, Brynn (Anchorage)  
Nelson, David (Anchorage)  
Rentzel, Jeffrey (Fairbanks)  
Robbins, Christine (Fairbanks)  
Skultka, Charline (Anchorage)  
Stevenson, Austin (Soldotna)  
Stump, Nathan (Kenai)

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Governor Michael J. Dunleavy:

The Governor-appointed Alaska Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (AJJAC) presents its 2019 Annual Report. AJJAC is proud to serve Alaskans as the State Advisory Group under the Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Act. AJJAC continues to have a positive and productive partnership with the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), helping to guide the compliance of four core federal mandates.

**AJJAC**  
our kids • our state • our future



In 2018 the Legislature passed SB 105 for a Trauma-Informed Government. Following that passage, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Commissioner Adam Crum published a [policy statement](#) recognizing the impacts of trauma. He wrote to ensure that DHSS, which includes DJJ, act in a trauma-informed manner and that departmental services help mitigate factors related to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

DJJ has piloted and has instituted best practices that align with this policy statement:

- employee training on ACEs and trauma responsive practices;
- utilizing common trauma screening tools when appropriate;
- using culturally responsive assessments and treatment;
- addressing intersections of disparities and diversity;
- maximizing physical and psychological safety; and more.

This approach to meeting mission is incredibly important toward lasting impacts.

Lastly, AJJAC recognizes the difficult fiscal decisions the State of Alaska made in 2019. DJJ was no exception with the closure of the Nome Youth Facility, which provided secure detention and secure treatment services for youth primarily from northern and western regions. There are statewide impacts to services through this closure. In this report you will read about some critical functions that must remain at the forefront during consolidation.

The AJJAC membership hopes you find this report informative.

Respectfully,

*Amy Gorn*

AJJAC Chair



Kenai Peninsula Youth Facility, photo by Connor Barry

## AJJAC'S RECOMMENDATIONS

### 2018 Report Follow-Up: Fairbanks Youth Facility

In last year's report AJJAC raised concerns about the physical conditions of Alaska's second largest juvenile correctional facility, the Fairbanks Youth Facility (FYF). AJJAC keeps these necessary improvements at the forefront of its recommendations, as the facility was built prior to knowing the benefits of a therapeutic physical environment. Recalling the DHSS trauma-informed policy statement, it states that DHSS will work to create trauma-informed environments. In the case of FYF, physical improvements are critical along with the programs run within. In understanding the needs youth bring with them into state custody, **AJJAC advocates again for FYF renovations.**

### Specialized Training to Meet Serious Needs

Each year at the annual AJJAC meeting, members learn about current trends in Alaska juvenile justice through a data presentation by DJJ staff. This event has always been a source of lively discussion among members, and then recommendations to the division are often crafted. During the 2019 DJJ data presentation an observable trend dating back ten years was noted, which clearly shows a decrease in referred juvenile crime in Alaska. Within that same trend there is also an observable rise in the crime category of "felony offenses against persons." These types of referrals often include acts of assault and homicide. AJJAC is concerned with the rise in this trend and is equally as concerned with the young ages of those charged with these crimes. Crimes in this category are often automatically waived to adult court depending upon the age of the youth. It can be assumed that a number of these serious crimes are perpetrated by a very young group of juveniles who are not subject to an automatic waiver (<16 years). Given all of this, AJJAC raises the question of DJJ's capacity to treat this group of youthful offenders who are responsible for the most serious crimes shown in the data. AJJAC has previously recommended increased training support for DJJ Mental Health Clinicians. Another previous recommendation related to this effort promoted the use of a trauma screening tool for youth in DJJ custody.

Due to age, treatment needs, and risk to Alaskan communities, successful treatment methods are imperative for the success of these kids and their families. To ensure DJJ has the expertise to be effective, **AJJAC recommends that the division be supported as it secures appropriate staff training for youth with increasingly complex needs.**

### Technology Is A Success Factor

The closure of the Nome Youth Facility means some juveniles referred to DJJ from Northwest Alaska will travel further from their families and home communities upon entering state custody. A known success factor to rehabilitation is connection to positive supports and preparation for eventual re-entry. As youth move around Alaska following a court order, technology plays a key role in connecting families. While hosting focus groups in DJJ facilities, AJJAC members listen to youth consistently express the importance of speaking with and seeing the people with whom they are approved to communicate. **AJJAC recommends that DJJ continue to strengthen and expand the access of technology for visitation, programs, and therapies.** AJJAC supports a policy for the use of videoconferencing in all facilities as a rehabilitation and therapeutic tool, especially as facilities consolidate across the state.

The mission of the DJJ is to

- hold juvenile offenders accountable for their behavior,
- promote the safety and restoration of victims and communities, and
- assist offenders and their families in developing skills to prevent future crime.



### JJDP Act Four Core Mandates:

1. Deinstitutionalization of Status offenders
2. Sight and Sound Separation of Juvenile and Adult Offenders
3. Removal of Juveniles from Adult Jails and Lockups
4. Addressing Disproportionate Minority Contact in the Juvenile Justice System