



Alaska Reentry & Justice Partnership

A statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that support justice-involved Alaskans at all phases of their justice involvement. Members include people with lived experience, family members, reentry coalitions, reentry case managers, community providers, local and statewide organizations.

PRELIMINARY LEGISLATIVE OUTCOMES (May 2022)

The Alaska State Legislature passed the following bills and budget items during the 2022 Legislative session that impact justice-involved Alaskans—including improved access to substance use and mental health treatment, reentry services, crisis stabilization, education and training, housing and employment assistance, faith-based and tribal, peer support, and visitation. Many items are still subject to veto by the Governor. Public comment is open until the budget is signed. Below is contact information for the Governor and items impacting justice-involved Alaskans that are still at risk of veto.

To contact the Governor with your comments, go to: <https://gov.alaska.gov/contact/email-the-governor/> and click on “I wish to share my views or suggestions on a particular topic with the Dunleavy Administration”

BUDGET priorities that PASSED (subject to veto):

Behavioral Health Treatment & Recovery (BHTR) Grants. The Legislature added +\$859,500 for grants to community mental health and substance use treatment providers for outpatient and residential treatment and other behavioral health services.

Behavioral Health Prevention & Early Intervention (BHPEI) Grants. The Legislature added +\$246,700 for grants to community providers for prevention and early intervention services, FASD awareness and training, suicide prevention, and substance misuse prevention.

Peer Support Certification. The Legislature accepted the Mental Health Trustee recommendation to maintain \$130,000 MHTAAR funds and add +\$50,000 for continued implementation of Alaska’s Peer Support Certification program. Peer support is a critical service highlighted in the 1115 Medicaid Behavioral Health Waiver effort and in community behavioral health settings across the state.

Crisis Stabilization. The Legislature accepted the Mental Health Trust recommendation to add +\$900,000 for *Crisis Now Continuum of Care Grants* for crisis stabilization and care in Anchorage, Mat-Su, Fairbanks, and Juneau. The Legislature added an additional +\$8 million for crisis stabilization services at Providence Alaska Medical Center. Crisis stabilization reduces the need for law enforcement, emergency medical services, hospital emergency rooms, courts, and corrections.

Holistic Defense. The Legislature maintained \$86,000 to the Public Defender Agency for the Holistic Defense project in Bethel, Nome, Kotzebue, and Anchorage. Project participants' legal needs are addressed with a criminal defense attorney, social worker that assists with unmet community needs (housing, employment, treatment), and a civil legal aid attorney who addresses civil needs of vulnerable or un-resourced Alaskans.

New Mental Health Positions at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center (HMCC). The Legislature accepted the Governor’s request to add +1.66 million for six new healthcare staff positions (nurses, physician’s assistant, mental health clinician) to DOC’s new mental health unit for incarcerated females with mental illness at HMCC. An additional +\$476,000 was added for a nurse and mental health clinician at the new booking section at HMCC, to more appropriately serve women entering custody in the Anchorage area.

Discharge Planning in Corrections. The Legislature maintained \$290,000 to continue funding the APIC (Assess, Plan, Identify, and Coordinate) program, providing reentry services for Alaskans with mental illness and other disabilities who need intensive support. Practices include engagement with soon-to-be-released incarcerated individuals to develop and secure a transition plan that supports their needs and reduces the risk of continued criminal activity.

Training for DOC Mental Health Staff. The Legislature maintained \$25,000 to provide both specialized and foundational training on mental health disorders and cognitive impairments, best-practices, and community behavioral health treatment to mental health clinical staff. DOC has 48 clinicians, psychiatric nurses, counselors, adult nurse practitioners (ANPs) and psychiatrists systemwide who benefit from these training opportunities to better understand special needs populations. Funds pay to bring all clinical staff to one location for two days of training, provided by in-state and out-of-state experts on a variety of specialized topics—including substance use disorders, mental illness, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, traumatic brain injury, developmental disabilities, etc.

Public Defender Agency (PDA). The Legislature added +\$1.38 million as a one-time increment for retention bonuses for PDA staff who provide legal support to Alaska’s most vulnerable citizens. Recent efforts by the agency include case management for defendants with behavioral health and cognitive disabilities.

Domestic Violence Sexual Assault (DVSA) Grants. The Legislature added +\$3.5 million as a one-time increment for community-based DVSA programs statewide for 24-hour emergency shelters, advocacy services, child advocacy centers, legal services for victims, and mental health care for young victims and witnesses of DVSA.

Step-Up Program at Mclaughlin Youth Facility. The Legislature added back +\$336,400 that was removed in FY22. Step-Up is a partnership between Division of Juveniles Justice and the Anchorage School District for youth with significant behavior challenges causing them to be suspended or expelled from school.

Vocational Opportunities for Older Youth. The Legislature accepted the Governor’s recommendation to add +100,000 to support youth aging out of foster care with housing and financial support, while they participate in a specified vocational or career training.

Youth with Complex Trauma Placement Support. The Legislature accepted the Governor’s recommendation to add +\$700,000 for compensation to foster care providers who serve youth with high complex needs so that the youth can remain in Alaska with appropriate supports in place. These funds help keep youth out of expensive emergency rooms, Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API), corrections, or out-of-state placements.

Support for Youth Aged 18-21. The Legislature accepted the Governor’s recommendation to add +\$1 million to serve youth aging out of foster care with housing and household goods, utilities, employment support, transportation, financial management, and more.

Intensive At-Risk Early Intervention Services. The Legislature accepted the Mental Health Trust recommendation to add +\$460,000 for grants to community agencies to hire highly-qualified Early Intervention and Infant Learning Program (EI/ILP) providers to serve 200+ high-risk families with young children who experience developmental delays, early behavioral concerns, etc. Funds support screening, developmental monitoring, parenting guidance, access to resources and referral supports, and more.

IT/Telehealth Service System Improvements. The Legislature accepted the Mental Health Trust recommendation to maintain \$63,000 for telehealth improvements and add +\$24,900 above FY22 levels for a full-time staff to support expanding the telehealth efforts in Alaska. Individuals who receive personal care assistance or Medicaid waiver services require an annual reassessment. Recipients who live outside of the regional hub communities difficulties getting timely assessments because of travel, cost of travel, and in-

person requirements. Through telehealth, reassessments can be conducted at local clinics, saving the state money, but also the inconvenience and costs rural Alaskans must experience.

BILL priorities that PASSED (subject to veto):

HB 172 – Crisis Stabilization, Mental Health Facilities (Governor Dunleavy). Improves access to crisis stabilization services for Alaskans experiencing a mental health or substance use emergency. The bill offers law enforcement and first responders additional tools for addressing behavioral health crises, including the option to drop off at a crisis stabilization center, access to mental health care, triage, referral, and stabilization. The bill also addresses the administration of psychotropic medication and involuntary commitment.

HB 265 – Health Care Services By Telehealth (Rep. Spohnholz). This bill allows a health care provider to provide services within the provider's authorized scope of practice to a patient in Alaska through telehealth without first conducting an in-person examination if the health care provider holds a license in good standing. It also requires the state to establish fees for telehealth services that are equal to in-person services; increases access for audio-only appointments; eliminates in-person barriers to medication assisted treatment; and requires the state to allow telehealth services via Medicaid for behavioral health, waiver/demonstration services, community health aides, behavioral health and dental aides, chemical dependency counselors and rural health clinics (with some limitations). Many justice-involved Alaskans have depended on telehealth services to access both behavioral health and reentry supports and services, and will continue to benefit if telehealth options remain available.

BILL priorities that DID NOT PASS (not subject to veto):

HB 118 – Access to ID, Driver's License, Digital Technology (Rep. Kreiss-Tomkins). This legislation would require the Division of Motor Vehicles to send an ID/Driver's License to the Department of Corrections (DOC) upon request for eligible individuals serving 120 days or more, before their release. It also requires DOC to work in good faith to make sure a prisoner has a valid state id upon release. Additionally, it expands the allowable uses for access to computers and digital technology in Alaska's corrections for improved reentry planning, access to treatment and recovery services, education and training, faith-based, tribal, visitation, and other activities. This law does not give incarcerated individuals free access to the Internet, but allows DOC to use the Internet to provide safe and secure programs and activities, delivered through digital solutions, such as tablets, video-conferencing, closed-circuit television.

HB 246 – Access to Marijuana Conviction Records (Rep. Kreiss-Tomkins). This legislation addresses background checks and shields certain records of cases in which individuals were previously convicted of minor marijuana possession crimes that would be legal under today's laws (less than one ounce, at least 21 years old, no other convictions in the same case). It removes these records from online sources, such as Court View, but does not permanently remove (expunge) them from the Courts' permanent files. This legislation addresses an important barrier for getting employment and housing for justice-involved Alaskans, which increases the likelihood of stability and success in their communities after their justice-involvement.