

which includes amendments to definitions of human trafficking, as well as a nondiscrimination clause regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth.

In 2013, HUD mandated three additional categories of age groupings be added to homeless data collection: under 18 years of age, 18–24 years of age, and over 24 years of age. The inclusion of these data fields will assist in gathering more detailed information on the number of homeless youth. Homeless youth do not often identify themselves as “homeless”—even if they have no stable living situation. They consider themselves to be “couch surfing” or “hanging out.” Unaccompanied youth are often underreported and some areas of the country have been exploring the use of age peers to assist with data collection of this subpopulation.

Homeless Households in Anchorage

In addition to data on the number of *persons* who are homeless, the PIT count also collects statistics on the number of *households* that are homeless. In this article the main focus is on homeless persons. However, Table 13 presents trends in homeless *households* for Anchorage for the period 2008–2014. Although the number of persons in homeless households *with dependent children* has declined 12.5 percent over the period, the overall number of homeless households has increased by 8.4 percent and the total number of persons in homeless households has increased 0.1 percent.

Conclusion

According to HUD PIT counts, overall numbers of homeless persons (sheltered and unsheltered) dropped 3.7 percent from 2012 to 2013 in the U.S., while Alaska showed an increase of 1.7 percent. Many subpopulations of homeless persons also decreased nationwide and in Alaska during this period.

However, while the number of unsheltered homeless individuals declined nationwide by 11.6 percent, in Alaska, the number of unsheltered homeless persons increased 4 percent—going from 197 in 2012 to 205 in 2013. (Data not shown.)

Agencies in the state and around the nation are working on plans to end homelessness. Statewide, the Alaska Council on the Homeless was established in 2004 and issued its first report in 2005 and a *10 Year Plan To End Long Term Homelessness in Alaska* in 2009. The Council is currently reviewing its plan and will complete the process by spring 2015. The Municipality of Anchorage first developed a ten-year plan to end homelessness in 2005. The plan has undergone review and revision, the most current of which is this year’s review by the Housing and Neighborhood Development (HAND) Commission Oversight Subcommittee on Homelessness (HCOSH). The *Municipality of Anchorage Ten-Year Plan on Homelessness: Status Update* was submitted in May 2014. The Municipality of Anchorage Department of Health and Human Services, the HAND Commission, HCOSH, and the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness all contributed to this effort. All of the above agencies are currently developing plans for the next five years.

Gathering reliable data on homeless persons continues to be a challenge. Because of different release dates of data, it is not always easy to make comparisons of same-year data. In some cases, data fields and descriptions may differ making direct comparison problematic. And definitions of homelessness do not always align with each other.

In Alaska, the Continuums of Care are working with agencies to improve

the quality of data that is reported to the AKHMIS. AKHMIS recently hosted training for agencies and is reviewing an evaluation of its current procedures for data collection. The goal is to streamline the data process and make data more useful at the community level. The evaluation highlighted the need for greater reporting by geographic location. As noted above, Alaska currently has only two Continuums of Care—one for Anchorage and one that covers that rest of the state. It has been suggested that given the regional variations in a state the size of Alaska, having more regional CoCs could improve data collection and the identification of needs in particular communities. However, CoCs operate under HUD regulations, and there is concern that other communities in Alaska may not have the resources to meet HUD requirements to operate as a CoC. The Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness also established a data group this spring to assist in reviewing data and identifying gaps in data collection and sources.

Public and private agencies in the United States and Alaska continue to work together to end homelessness. Identifying who is homeless and what the needs are of homeless individuals and families remain critical elements of that goal. Trained data collectors and researchers are integral to this process. Effective allocation of resources, policy-making, and implementation of programs depend on reliable information about the homeless persons in our communities.

Barbara Armstrong is the editor of the Alaska Justice Forum. Sharon Chamard is a member of the Justice Center faculty. Derek Witte, Justice major, assisted in the compilation of point-in-time (PIT) counts data for Anchorage.

The Alaska Criminal Justice Commission: A Legislative Call for Action

Mary Geddes

Given the reported high rates of recidivism for Alaska offenders and the upwards trajectory of prison costs, Alaska’s state legislative leadership is urgently seeking alternatives to current criminal sentencing law and practices. With interest piqued by the “Right on Crime” and other states’ initiatives for more cost-effective approaches to incarceration, Senate Majority Leader and Judiciary Committee Chair John Coghill led a bipartisan effort this past legislative session (2013–2014) to enact some reforms through an omnibus crime bill, Senate Bill 64. In addition to reforms relating to a num-

ber of criminal justice system issues (see sidebar on page 12), SB 64 also created and charged a new entity, the Alaska Criminal Justice Commission, with evaluating and making recommendations “for improving criminal sentencing practices and criminal justice practices, including rehabilitation and restitution.” Over a three-year period the Commission is mandated to meet at least quarterly and submit an annual report of its activities to the governor and the legislature. The report may include “recommendations for legislative and administrative action.” A separate special report on AS 28 alcohol-related offenses is to be submitted to the

governor and the legislature by July 1, 2017 and must include evaluation of specific issues and recommendations (see below). The Alaska Judicial Council will be responsible for staff and administrative support for the Commission.

In seeking the passage of SB 64 before the Senate on April 22, 2014, Coghill explained the need for a critical evaluation of current laws and practice. Coghill explained, “We have become very prescriptive in our laws. But they are sometimes prescriptive in a way that doesn’t mesh real well with [the goals

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Senate Bill 64 — Omnibus Crime Bill

In addition to establishing the Alaska Criminal Justice Commission, Senate Bill 64 also addresses other justice-related issues including:

- the crime of custodial interference;
- the crimes of theft, criminal mischief, and defrauding creditors, and raising the monetary threshold for felony offenses from \$500 to \$750;
- conditions for pre-trial release, probation, and parole for persons awaiting trial or convicted of alcohol-related and substance abuse crimes;
- increased jail-time credit availability for persons in court-ordered treatment programs;
- the consideration of combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a mitigating factor during sentencing;
- electronic monitoring in lieu of jail for first-time DUI offenders;
- the requirement that the Department of Corrections establish screening procedures to identify offenders who may be vulnerable to exploitation and recidivism due to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, fetal alcohol syndrome, or another brain-based disorder;
- the expansion of the PACE (Probation Accountability with Certain Enforcement) program with the Alaska Court System to ensure rapid response to probation violations by offenders convicted of a substance abuse crime;
- the establishment by the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Corrections of a recidivism reduction fund to provide community-based transitional reentry services for recently released offenders; and
- the requirement that the Department of Corrections administer a risk/needs assessment tool to all offenders sentenced to 30 days or more in order to assist in the identification of the rehabilitation needs of these individuals.

The full text of the SB 64 is available at http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_fulltext.asp?session=28&bill=SB64.

Commission

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here]. We still want people to be accountable for any crime they do, but the rigidity [in those laws] ... has to be looked at." Noting that "Just putting people in jail doesn't make Alaska safer, especially if you turn them out of jail with no avenue of success," Coghill said that the Commission should "look at the array of programs, talk to people, [and] come back to us with recommendations." "Coghill has emphasized, "I just have to believe we will see a shift in Alaska that will make us safer, [and] ... keep people accountable at less cost to the state."

SB 64 passed unanimously in both the Senate and House, and was signed by Governor Sean Parnell on July 16, 2014. At that time, the Alaska Criminal Justice Commission sprang into existence. Its future commissioners (soon to be named) will include the following (or their designees): the chief justice of the Alaska Supreme Court, two other state court judges, a representative of the Alaska Native community, the attorney general, the public defender, the commissioners of the Department of Public Safety and of the Department of Corrections, the executive director of the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, a municipal law enforcement representative, a victims' advocate, and two ex officio members of the legislature. The voting commissioners and the two ex officio Legislative members have from June 30, 2014–June 30, 2017 to accomplish their mandate.

SB64 outlines specific issues the Commission is to consider in the formulation of its evaluation and recommendations regarding the "effect of sentencing laws and criminal justice practices on the criminal

justice system." These include considering:

- statutes, court rules, and court decisions relevant to criminal justice sentencing;
- the sentencing practices of the judiciary, including the use of presumptive sentencing, and the means of promoting uniformity, proportionality, and accountability in sentencing;
- crime and incarceration rates, including the rate of violent crime and the abuse of controlled substances, in Alaska compared to other states, and best practices adopted by other states that have proven to be successful in reducing recidivism;
- whether state agency and correctional resources are sufficient to administer the criminal justice system of the state;
- alternatives to traditional forms of incarceration including measures promoting rehabilitation and restitution;
- the adequacy, availability, and effectiveness of treatment and restitution programs;
- the relationship between sentencing priorities and correctional resources;
- the effectiveness of the state's current methodologies for collection and dissemination of criminal justice data; and
- the appropriateness of schedules for controlled substances in AS11.71.140-11.71.190.

July 1, 2017 is the deadline for the Commission to submit a special report on AS 28 alcohol-related offenses. The report must include recommendations on:

- whether a revision of AS 28 is needed;
- whether both the administrative and

court license revocation processes should be maintained;

- whether ignitions interlock devices are effective;
- whether the various penalties for offenses of driving under the influence of an alcoholic beverage, inhalant, or controlled substance and refusal to submit to a chemical test should be increased or decreased;
- whether programs promoting offender accountability are effective in reducing recidivism; and
- whether limited licenses should be available for persons charged with or convicted of offenses of driving while under the influence of alcohol, inhalants, or controlled substances or refusal to submit to a chemical test.

As part of its process of making recommendations on "possible approaches to sentencing and administration of justice in the state," the Commission is to follow a methodology outlined in SB64. Key points in the methodology include soliciting and considering information and views from a broad variety of constituencies and basing recommendations on 12 factors. The factors cover a broad range from consideration of the seriousness of an offense, the need to rehabilitate, the need to confine offenders to prevent harm to the public, the elimination of unjustified disparity in sentencing, and the effects of criminal justice laws and practices on reducing recidivism to peer reviewed and data-driven research and the effectiveness of evidence-based restorative-justice initiatives.

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