

Alaska Criminal Justice Commission

Meeting Summary

Monday, March 4, 2019

11:00 am – 4:30 p.m.

Sealaska Heritage Institute, Living History Room

105 S. Seward Street, Juneau, AK 99801

And audio-teleconference

Commissioners Present: Joel Bolger, Sean Case, Matt Claman, Greg Razo, Stephanie Rhoades, Brenda Stanfill, Quinlan Steiner, Trevor Stephens, Steve Williams

Commissioners Absent: Kevin Clarkson (Rob Henderson served as proxy for Attorney General Clarkson), Adam Crum, Nancy Dahlstrom (Kelly Goode served as proxy for Commissioner Dahlstrom), Shelley Hughes (Regina Largent served as proxy for Senator Hughes), Amanda Price (Michael Duxbury served as proxy for Commissioner Price).

Participants: Nancy Meade, Lizzie Kubitz, Troy Payne, Brad Myrstol, Laura Brooks, Andy Jones, Jillian Gellings, Katie Baldwin-Johnson, Mike Matthews, Dusty Dumont, Araceli Valle, Cathleen McLaughlin, Janice Weiss, Triada Stampas, Bob Churchill, Tony Piper, Donald Revels, Kim Stone, Gen Moreau

Staff: Susanne DiPietro, Susie Dosik, Brian Brossmer, Staci Corey, Barbara Dunham

Agenda

Commissioner Steve Williams asked to add an update on the Behavioral Health Standing Committee to the end of the agenda. The agenda was approved so amended without objection.

DOC Recidivism Data

Laura Brooks, Operations Manager for the Division of Health and Rehabilitative Services of the Department of Corrections (DOC), spoke to the Commission about DOC's recidivism data.

She began by explaining that Alaska is one of six states in the nation that operates a unified correctional system, meaning that the state operates both the jails for pre-trial and misdemeanor offenders and prisons for sentenced felony offenders. There are 12 jails and prisons statewide, and 13 field probation offices. There are also 15 regional and community jail contracts and seven contract community residential centers (CRCs, or halfway houses). DOC has also established electronic monitoring programs in seven communities.

In 2018, there were 31,533 bookings into DOC facilities (many of those bookings were for the same person). As of December 31, 2018, there were 4437 offenders in jail or prison, 45% of whom were unsentenced. Also as of December 31, 2018, 3,547 people were on probation or parole, 967 defendants were on pretrial supervision, 230 people were in CRCs, and 167 people were on electronic monitoring.

DOC measures recidivism by looking at felony offenders who are re-incarcerated within three years of release; re-incarceration includes returning to prison for a probation or parole violation, new felony crime, or new misdemeanor crime. This rate has consistently been in the mid-to-upper 60th percentile (meaning that about 2/3 of all felons released from prison returned

to prison within three years), but recently, Alaska has begun to see a steady decline in this rate. For the cohort of people convicted of a felony and released from a DOC facility in 2015, the three-year recidivism rate was 61.33%.

The decreased recidivism rate of the 2015 cohort reflects changes that DOC began to implement within facilities and for supervision, including using risk assessments to target interventions and ensuring that programming was using evidence-based practices. Some of these changes were implemented before SB 91 and some after.

Of those who return to prison within six months, 58% do so for a probation or parole violation. Of those who return to prison within three years, 46% do so for a probation or parole violation. Excluding probation and parole violations, the three-year recidivism rate for the 2015 cohort was 32%. Of that same cohort, 20% returned for facing felony charges.

Broken down by classification of the persons original conviction offense, recidivism was now in all offense classes except for offenses against a person and weapons offenses:

OFFENSE CLASS	2013	2014	2015
ALCOHOL	57.7%	57.2%	49.3%
DRIVING/TRANSPORT	58.1%	68.9%	47.6%
DRUGS	62.9%	56.6%	55.0%
PAROLE/PROBATION	69.8%	67.5%	63.6%
PERSON	63.8%	62.3%	66.7%
PROPERTY	71.9%	70.7%	67.6%
PUBLIC ORDER/ADMIN	68.1%	72.6%	61.7%
SEX OFFENSE (REG)	54.2%	48.6%	38.6%
WEAPONS	56.7%	54.1%	60.0%
TOTAL	67.0%	65.1%	61.3%

People returning to prison for a new offense tended to return for the same offense for which they were first convicted:

RETURNED OFFENSE	RELEASED OFFENSE								
	ALCOHOL	DRIVING/ TRANSPORTATION	DRUGS	PAROLE/ PROBATION	PERSON	PROPERTY	PUBLIC ORDER/ ADMINISTRATION	SEX OFFENSE (REG)	WEAPONS
ALCOHOL	9.31%	0.00%	1.40%	3.34%	1.22%	0.22%	1.21%	0.00%	0.00%
DRIVING/ TRANSPORTATION	2.45%	0.00%	1.40%	0.94%	0.49%	0.44%	0.00%	0.00%	8.57%

DRUGS	0.49%	2.33%	9.58%	2.82%	1.71%	2.89%	1.81%	0.00%	5.71%
PAROLE/PROBATION	24.23%	31.32%	23.93%	29.48%	39.14%	27.16%	29.17%	27.24%	28.57%
PERSON	3.43%	6.98%	1.64%	11.16%	9.27%	5.33%	6.63%	2.48%	8.57%
PROPERTY	0.49%	2.33%	3.74%	5.32%	2.68%	13.56%	6.02%	0.00%	5.71%
PUBLIC ORDER/ADMINISTRATION	8.40%	4.65%	12.62%	9.23%	11.22%	16.22%	15.66%	4.96%	2.86%
SEX OFFENSE (REG)	0.49%	0.00%	0.00%	0.57%	0.49%	0.22%	0.00%	3.92%	0.00%
WEAPONS	0.00%	0.00%	0.70%	0.73%	0.49%	1.56%	1.21%	0.00%	0.00%
TOTAL	49.30%	47.60%	55.00%	63.60%	66.70%	67.60%	61.70%	38.60%	60.00%

DOC also performs risk assessments (the instrument is called the LSI-R) for every prisoner serving a term of incarceration of more than 30 days. The higher the assessed level of risk, the more likely it was that a person would recidivate.

The highest risk for recidivism is within 6 months of release. In any given year, approximately 25% of releases will return to incarceration within six months, and more than 40% will return within one year. After three years, the number of returns to incarceration falls considerably.

Ms. Brooks concluded by listing the available reentry and rehabilitative programs provided by DOC, and said that reentry remains a priority for the Department. She noted that DOC had just hired Janice Weiss to coordinate reentry efforts for the Department. All offenders receive an offender management plan (OMP) intended to address the offender's criminogenic needs.

Sanctions and Incentives at DOC

Mike Matthews and Dusty Dumont presented information on sanctions and incentives used within the Division of Probation and Parole at DOC. Mr. Matthews, Research Analyst for DOC, presented the data, while Ms. Dumont, a probation/parole officer, was on hand to answer any programmatic questions.

Mr. Matthews began by explaining that the data on sanctions and incentives should all be taken with a grain of salt, since they concern initiatives that are relatively new, and these data have not been tracked or reported before. The data is subject to change, and not enough time has passed to show whether there has been any impact on recidivism.

Mr. Matthews explained that between 1/1/17 and 2/5/2019, parole/probation officers made 21,403 sanction reports, which described 21,804 sanctions imposed. (Some reports contained more than one sanction.) Around 4,917 people were sanctioned in those reports.

The 21,804 sanctions ranged from arrest or issuing a warrant for an arrest to increased PO contact and verbal or written warnings. Arrests and warrants for arrest were the most common sanction, followed by verbal warnings. The undesired behavior most commonly leading to a sanction was drug or alcohol use (36%).

During that same time period, parole/probation officers issued 9,175 incentives, the most common of which was verbal praise (8,292). Other incentives included things such as reducing urinalysis appointments and enhancing travel.

Commissioners noted that within the list of incentives granted, the number of Earned Compliance Credits (ECCs) granted seemed low (81); Ms. Dumont explained that ECCs were calculated automatically by DOC's data tracking system (ACOMS); the number reflected in the incentives report likely represented occasions when ECCs would not have been granted but officers awarded them as a reward for good behavior. For example, someone on supervision might receive a sanction and therefore would not receive an ECC for that month, but if that person could course-correct within the month, the officer would see that the ECC was granted.

Judge Rhoades noted that there were many more sanctions than incentives issued, and recalled that best practice was to issue more incentives than sanctions at a ratio of roughly six to one. Ms. Dumont explained that parole/probation officers were busy and that things like arrests and warrants would more likely be documented by officers than incentives, which may be given but officers may not have the time to document. Deputy DOC Commissioner Kelly Goode pointed out that minus the arrests and warrants on the sanctions side, the number of sanctions and incentives was roughly equal.

Mr. Matthews explained that from January 1, 2017 to March 2, 2019, 9,500 people on probation or parole had been eligible to earn ECCs and 7,823 of those people had earned an ECC at least once. Additionally, in that same time period, there were 15,395 opportunities to obtain an ECC and of those, ECC was awarded 51% of the time. Once someone earns an ECC, they retain that credit even if they subsequently engage in undesired behavior.

Responding to questions from the Commission, Ms. Dumont said that many of the new policies put in place by SB 91 were things she had already been doing, and that she wished she now had more discretion post-SB 91. For example, parole/probation officers do not have discretion over whether to allow early termination of supervision due to earning ECCs. There are cases when someone has earned enough ECCs to be discharged but they have been engaging in undesired behavior and the probation or parole officer feels the person should not be discharged from supervision.

Commissioner Brenda Stanfill noted that while Ms. Dumont's office in Juneau may have been using these policies before SB 91, from her observation that was not how things had worked in Fairbanks. Since these policies were implemented, she has seen improvements in probation/parole officer practices there. One of the reasons for putting these policies into SB 91 was standardization; if something is in regulations it's more likely to be followed.

Chair Claman noted that increased discretion can be beneficial as he benefitted from discretion after making a mistake as a teenager. But discretion also led to the gross sentencing disparities that prompted the creation of Alaska's presumptive sentencing structure. Presumptive sentencing was met with frustration in some quarters at first but is now widely accepted. There is an inherent tension between discretion and standardization.

Public Comment

Cathleen McLaughlin from Partners for Progress said that a question had been circulating in the reentry community lately as to whether community in-reach into DOC facilities had been

affected by the switch in administrations. She was happy to report that Partners was still doing inreach as it had been for the past three years; their access had not been compromised.

She was encouraged to hear that reentry was still a priority for DOC and that they were creating offender management plans (OMPs). However, she had yet to see an OMP; she thought it would be useful to send those plans to community reentry providers.

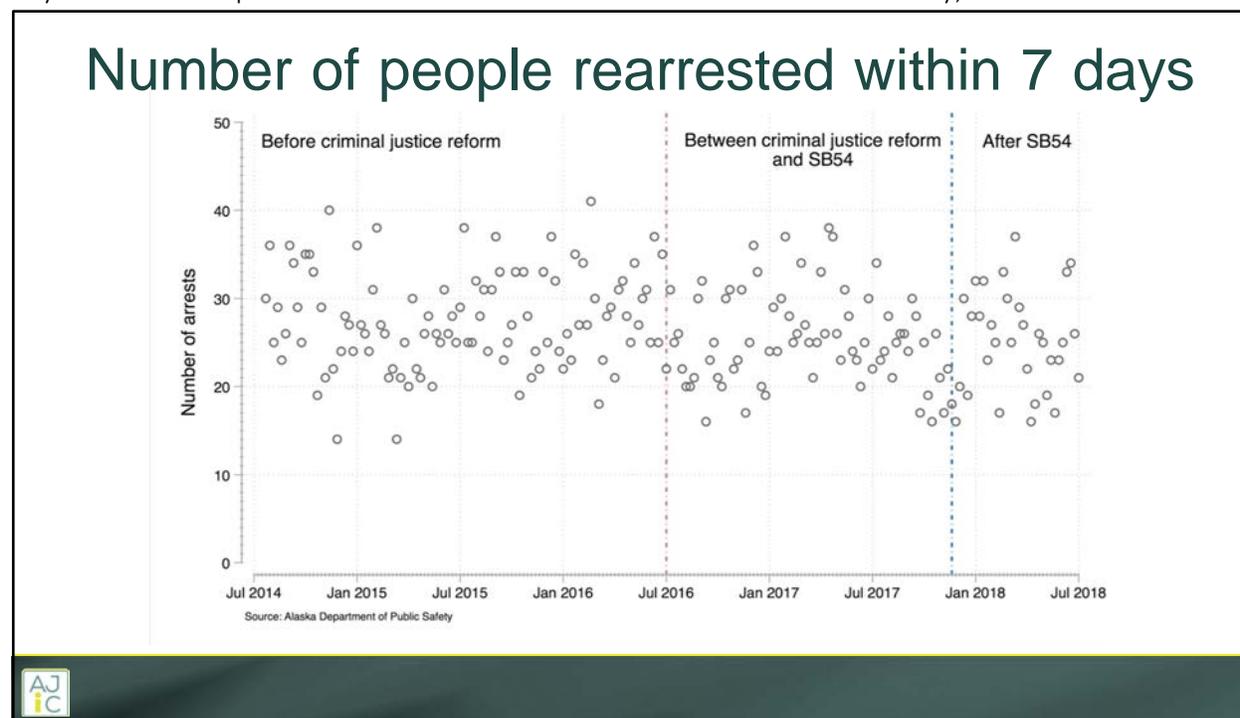
Bob Churchill, volunteer with the Alaska Nations Reentry Group, said that the ANRG was a support group for reentrants. Many of their group members were sex offenders who struggled being in Anchorage because they were not from around there and were on waitlists to get into treatment or their treatment was prolonged. He encouraged DOC to continue to expand teletreatment, noting it was not available in call cases. He also questioned the validity of polygraph tests being culturally appropriate for Alaska Natives. The ANRG's goal was to get participants back to their village if the village is willing to take them back.

Re-arrest Data

Dr. Troy Payne presented data to the Commission on re-arrests that occur within seven days of the first arrest. This was based on data that is required to be sent to the Commission per AS 44.19.645 (enacted by SB 91), including arrest and citation data as collected and reported by the Department of Public Safety (DPS).

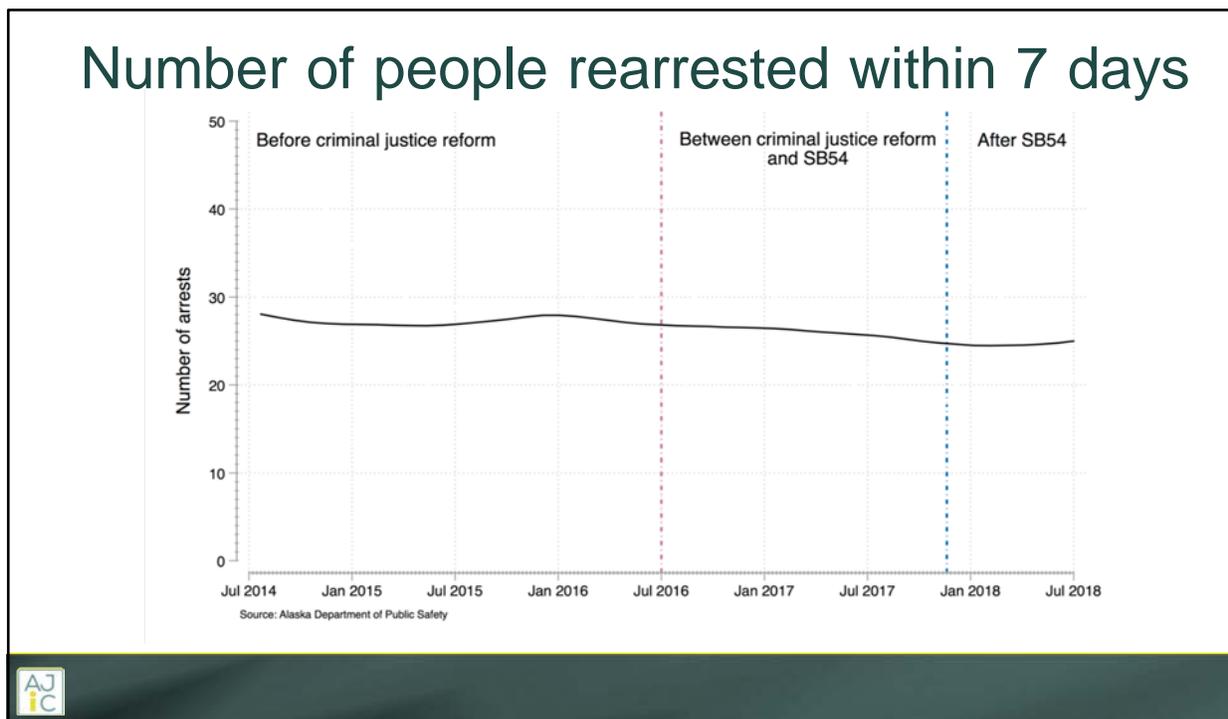
The DPS arrest and citation data used for this presentation include felony and misdemeanor arrests and citations; they do not include infractions or violations. There is one record per criminal charge, whether that charge is associated with an arrest or citation. Occasionally, DPS will only become aware of a charge at disposition. This data includes those charges.

In total, there were 222,313 charges between July 1, 2014 and December 31, 2018. Dr. Payne looked at which of those charges were repeat charges for the same individual within seven days or less. If a person was arrested more than once on the same day, each of those arrests



counted. He then tallied the number of people who were rearrested within that time period each week. There was no discernable difference in the pattern of rearrests before and after SB 91, and before and after SB 54.

He plotted the number of rearrests on a chart (above), and also smoothed out the plot points to create a chart that's slightly easier to understand (below).



Commissioner Quinlan Steiner said it appeared to him that this research shows that the popular “catch and release” narrative about criminal justice reform is completely false. Dr. Payne said that was one way to characterize it. Dr. Brad Myrstol, director of the UAA Justice Center and colleague of Dr. Payne, said that they had been monitoring the various legislative hearings to see if the Justice Center had the data to provide information the legislators were interested in. One question that kept popping up was the notion of “catch and release” and whether there was any data on that.

In response to Commission questions, Dr. Payne clarified that every arrest was counted, no matter how close in time to the original arrest. It only counted people who were charged with a crime, but this includes people who were charged and given a citation instead of booked into a correctional facility. He did not separate out misdemeanor and felony arrests, but noted that this cohort of arrestees tended to be generalists.

Dr. Payne’s analysis excluded arrests for violating conditions of release (VCOR) because for the period between SB 91 and SB 54, that was not a crime and there were no data points reflecting arrests for VCOR. When VCOR arrests were added back in for the period before SB 91 and the period after SB 54, there was still no discernable difference.

Judge Rhoades wondered who was in this group. Dr. Payne explained that they were getting arrested for many different things, though in order for someone to be arrested and either cited or booked and then released within the 7 days, they would more likely be charged with a misdemeanor.

Dr. Payne said he had done the same analysis for rearrests in different time frames: within 14 days, within 30 days, within 180 days, etc. No matter what the time window was, there was no difference in the number of rearrests before and after criminal justice reform.

Judge Rhoades asked whether he had performed any analysis looking at the difference between state and municipal charges. Dr. Payne said he hadn't, but could do that given time. Judge Rhoades said she was curious because some things changed regarding things being charged as misdemeanors.

Justice Bolger said he thought there were a number of factors that drive arrests and noting that many things have changed, was surprised these numbers remained stable. Dr. Payne said that was true and noted that the Anchorage Police Department in particular had added a lot of officers during this time, but the statewide numbers reflected in this data did not change.

Chair Claman said that he thought the public criticism related to the idea of "catch and release" was a broader criticism of people being let out on bail when the public thought they should not be let out; many of these releases were due to the bail schedule. Dr. Myrstol noted that the analysis does not show that cycling does not happen, but does show that the rate of cycling has not changed. Judge Stephens said that it would appear there is no factual reality to the public perception that SB 91 has made things worse in this area.

Ms. DiPietro noted that admissions to prison were up, but that more people were also being released. We now know that around 30% of arrestees are released per the bail schedule. It was curious that the rearrest rate remained the same since more people were being arrested and then released.

Judge Rhoades wondered whether it was possible to get more data on the people getting rearrested. Dr. Payne said it was. Chair Claman asked members of the Commission to funnel any additional research questions on this data through staff. Dr. Myrstol cautioned that good data analysis takes time, and there was only so much analysis they could perform in advance of the next meeting.

Sex Offenses Report

Commission staff attorney Barbara Dunham explained that this was the final draft of the report she had previewed at the previous meeting. The report does not have a due date. She encouraged Commissioners and their staff to contact her if they spotted any typos or formatting errors.

Commissioner Stanfill, who had been chairing the sex offenses workgroup, noted that the report had been in the works for several years. It is intended to be an overview of the law, research, and policies on sex offenses, and is meant to be used as a reference going forward. Because of the way the available data has been reported, the data sections don't flow nicely together, and it was not possible to tell the concise story she was hoping to tell.

Ms. Dunham said she drafted the report with input from the workgroup. Because the workgroup was open to all, a variety of perspectives are reflected in the report; some of these varying perspectives could be seen as contradictions. There were no specific recommendations in the report other than a general recommendation to rethink the state's approach to victim services. For the most part, this report was intended to be informational.

The introduction of the report highlighted some of the top line takeaways: the problem of sexual violence in Alaska is worse, using several measures, than the rest of the US; it is a problem that affects Alaska Native women disproportionately; the vast majority of sex offenses go unreported; and there are significant challenges in rural Alaska in terms of keeping victims safe. The news is not all bad, however, as newer research has shown that sex offender treatment and containment models are effective at reducing reoffending.

The first and largest section of the report focused on the available data on sex offenses. Ms. Dunham said the intent of this section was to start at the wide end of the “funnel” to give an estimate of how many people were affected by sexual violence, then to walk through the case processing data to conclude with data on convictions for sex offenses.

Ms. Dunham explained that it was impossible to know exactly how many people in Alaska have been the victim of a sex offense. The best way to get a sense of victimization is to conduct a victimization survey, which UAA and CDVSA have conducted twice on a statewide level, once in 2010 and once in 2015. It is not a perfect representation of all victimization in Alaska because it was a survey conducted only of women over 18 with access to a phone. However, it provided a sense of the order of magnitude of victimization. In 2015, 2.9% of women surveyed reported experiencing sexual violence in the previous year. 2.9% of all adult women in Alaska in 2015 amounted to over 7,000 women.

The next data point to get a sense of the rate of victimization in Alaska was reports to law enforcement, compiled by DPS. Ms. Dunham explained that DPS has been issuing special reports on sex offenses in Alaska since 2015, which provide a lot of data. In 2015, around 1300 sex offenses were reported to law enforcement. This data cannot be directly compared with the victimization data because it includes reported offenses against men and children, but it does give a sense of the order of magnitude and indicates that a great number of sex offenses go unreported.

Judge Rhoades asked whether there was any role in the report for expert commentary on why victims don't report. Ms. Dunham noted that the report states there were varying theories from stakeholders, as well as reference to national studies on why victims don't report and the need for an Alaska-specific study. There was also reference elsewhere in the report to the conditions that might suppress reporting, such as living in a small community, social pressure, and the perceived ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Ms. Dunham also noted that there was an upcoming study from UAA on victim perspectives of the criminal justice system. Dr. Myrstol explained this was a study from Dr. Johnson, who is on the SAK workgroup. The research question for the study is did the victim feel the system gave them justice after making a report. It would not give a reporting rate or reasons for not reporting.

Judge Rhoades said that readers of the Commission's report might ask why victims don't report, but she was not suggesting additional research.

Ms. Dunham explained that the next data subsection discussed sex offense case processing, and tries to convey a sense of the attrition that happens through case processing and tries to explain why not all cases result in a conviction for a sex offense. Because this report was intended for a general audience, there was a flowchart at the beginning of this section explaining the criminal justice process and how a case could drop out at each stage. Deputy DPS

Commissioner Michael Duxbury thought that it was important to explain the process but thought there was more to it, and thought the flowchart should mention the SART or CAC process.

Ms. Dunham noted that Commissioner Stanfill had wanted to delete a text box highlighting that of arrests by all Alaska law enforcement agencies 2008-2011, 68.9% of cases resulted in a conviction while 28% of charges resulted in a conviction. Commissioner Stanfill said that she thought it was misleading in that it seemed to misrepresent how many cases resulted in conviction. The Commission agreed to remove the text box.

Ms. Dunham explained that a section labeled “Sex Offense Case Processing: A Data Gap” tried to bring the above sections together to make a more fluid narrative despite the limitations in the available data. Ms. DiPietro said staff struggled with this because the data sets were not directly comparable and they did not want to confuse the reader. However, it does provide information on an order of magnitude level.

Justice Bolger wondered whether there was a way to highlight this information better. Ms. DiPietro said staff would work on the heading of the section.

Commissioner Steiner noted that the victimization data was not directly comparable to the case processing data because the victimization survey can include things that are not necessarily crimes. Ms. DiPietro said that the specific questions asked tended to produce answers that would probably reveal crimes. Dr. Myr Stol pointed out that the survey also measures victims, not victimizations, and that was another way to distinguish the survey from the case-level data. Commissioner Razo suggested separating out the victimization data from the other bullet points in this section. Chair Claman suggested taking clarifying language from the footnotes and putting them in the body text.

Ms. Dunham said the data section also included information on average sentence length and average number of prisoners incarcerated for a sex offense. The group thought it was important to highlight the reason why there were not many people in prison for a Class A felony sex offense (because there are not many of them.) Judge Rhoades wondered whether Alaska’s sentences were in line with other states’.

Ms. Dunham noted that the report also included some common case characteristics; Deputy Commissioner Duxbury asked whether strangulation was included in this data. Ms. Dunham replied that use of hand was included in the statistic on use of weapons in sex offenses.

Ms. Dunham explained that the data section contained information on sexual abuse of a minor (SAM) cases in which the defendant was age 21 or under, which was a topic that the legislature had expressed interest in knowing more about in a previous session. Staff had analyzed 2016 data from the Department of Law on this. There were not many SAM cases with defendants under age 21.

Commissioner Stanfill wondered whether this data could be broken down by ethnicity as there had been a request to get that information from a member of the public. Commission research analyst Staci Corey said that ethnicity was not provided in the data from Law. Deputy Attorney General Rob Henderson said that that data could be retrieved but it would have to be done by hand.

Ms. DiPietro noted that AFN had called on the Judicial Council to study ethnic disparities in sex offense cases. The Judicial Council approved this project and intended to find resources for

the project. They had some data on this from a felony process study of cases from 1999, but that needed to be updated. Commissioner Razo pointed out that study did show bias.

Deputy Commissioner Duxbury noted that troopers are no longer uniformly entering information on ethnicity in their reports. It doesn't serve a law enforcement purpose, so there is not much motivation to collect that information.

Ms. Dunham explained that after the data section, the next section of the report concerned Alaska's sex offense sentencing laws. It contained the current sentencing provisions, previous sentencing provisions, and legislative history of HB 218, which raised the sentences from the previous sentencing ranges to the current sentencing ranges in 2006. Ms. Dunham said that this section was intended to inform the legislature of what had happened since the last major revision to these laws. Some of the assumption made by legislators at the time was based on information and research that has since changed, been updated or been expanded.

Commissioner Steiner asked why there was wording in this section explaining there was no recommendation to change the existing sentencing laws. Ms. Dunham explained that workgroup members had been concerned about the way this section read, and wanted to clarify that it was not a call to repeal or change the existing sentencing laws. Commissioner Stanfill added that this had been a hot topic and that the language was intended to make it clear about what the Commission did and did not want to say.

Deputy AG Henderson noted that the Department of Law had pushed for the language to be included. Commissioner Steiner thought that was a good reason for taking it out. He thought it was a political statement and he was uncomfortable with it. He said that in 2006 the prevalent idea was that programming and treatment didn't work, requiring lengthy sentences. The report is just relaying that history and noting that the research has been updated.

Justice Bolger suggested a compromise removing some of the language in this section about not making a recommendation to repeal. The Commission agreed to this compromise.

Ms. Dunham explained that the next section talked about the perceived gaps in Alaska's sex offense laws and that the Commission was planning to review them. Commissioners Razo and Steiner suggested adding language clarifying that these suggestions came from victim advocates.

Ms. Dunham said the section on treatment and reentry also included information on sex offender registration. Ms. DiPietro said that information should be added to this section related to the *Doe* case (out-of-state convictions don't require registry if the offense requiring registry in another state is not similar to an offense requiring registry in this state). Judge Rhoades suggested adding information about the difficulty those with intellectual or developmental disabilities face in complying with registry statutes.

Ms. Dunham explained that the next section of the report talked about victim services and safety. Commissioner Stanfill asked whether the information on 44 out of 68 VPSO positions being filled had been verified. Deputy Commissioner Duxbury said that 44 was the current number. At one point there were as many as 90. VPSOs were not organized as a state entity so he didn't immediately know how many positions were open.

Commissioners wondered whether information should be added linking alcohol and substance abuse to the prevalence of sexual violence, and suggested pulling information from the McDowell report. Commissioner Stanfill cautioned that not all sexual violence was rooted in

substance abuse and thought it could be problematic to link the two. She was opposed to adding this information into the victims' section. Commissioners agreed to add another separate section referencing the McDowell report.

Judge Rhoades added that she was concerned the report did not address the issue of people who are developmentally disabled and committing sex offenses, and that these cases may not be processed appropriately. People who are developmentally disabled may be competent to stand trial but might not understand the nature or gravity of their conduct. She thought it was too late to add anything substantive on this but thought it deserved a mention. There was no objection to this.

The Commission unanimously voted to approve the report, amended as discussed during the meeting. Ms. Dunham said she would send the amended report out with changes tracked. If any Commissioner then objected to the report being sent out, she would consult about next steps with Chair Claman. Otherwise, the report would then be sent to the legislature.

Behavioral Health Standing Committee Update

Commissioner Williams gave the group a quick update on the Standing Committee. It met the previous Friday, with Judge Rhoades, Mr. Henderson, Laura Brooks, and Al Wall among others. It was a short but focused meeting to come up with a workplan for 2019. They identified several different areas to work on: crisis intervention teams/centers, jail-based diversion, Title 12 and the competency process, access to institutional treatment, and reentry and discharge planning.

Victim Listening Sessions

Ms. Dunham and Ms. DiPietro explained that the next victim listening session would take place in Fairbanks on March 10, with more to follow. They urged Commissioners to get in touch if they wanted to participate.