

Alaska Criminal Justice Commission

Ad-Hoc Workgroup Re: Victim Listening Session Planning

Meeting Summary

Monday, December 3, 2018, 12:00p.m.

Teleconference

Commissioners present: Sean Case, Matt Claman, Greg Razo, Stephanie Rhoades, Brenda Stanfill, Steve Williams

Staff: Barbara Dunham

Who Does the Commission Want to Hear From?

Commission Project Attorney Barbara Dunham explained that the previous roundtables, which took place in Bethel and Fairbanks in 2015, were focused on victims of violent crimes. She had heard interest from some Commissioners in making it open to victims of all crimes (i.e. including property crimes). Judge Rhoades asked what the roundtables had looked like before. Barbara explained that the Commission had invited victim advocacy groups who primarily represent victims of violent crime, particularly domestic violence and sexual assault.

Judge Rhoades thought this was a good question. People in Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley are very concerned about property crime, but then again, a discussion on property crime could dominate the conversation. Commissioner Case said there was value to hearing from victims of property crime but the Commission would largely know what they would say already. He agreed that it might dominate the conversation.

Judge Rhoades thought this went to the purpose of these listening sessions, and that the group should think about why the Commission wanted to do this. She wondered if a solution might be to have two sessions with different subjects.

Commissioner Razo said he was most interested in making sure the Commission reached rural Alaska. Judge Rhoades said she thought Commissioner Razo's idea of picking times when a lot of people would be around (i.e. statewide or areawide conventions or meetings) was a good one—it would be best to make these listening sessions easy to get to by being where people will already be. She thought that victims of property crime and victims of violent crime would have different conversations, but it was important to have a forum for them. In smaller areas it might not be possible to have separate forums, but in urban areas it could work. Commissioner Razo agreed.

Commissioner Williams thought that the Commission would have to be clear in communicating its purpose to the attendees, and explain thoroughly what the Commission can and can't do. If attendees misunderstand the Commission's mandate, it might engender further frustration.

Commissioner Stanfill said that she attended the roundtable in Fairbanks in 2015 and that it was more focused on violent crimes because that was the purview of the advocacy groups who were invited. She noted that this time around the Commission needed to hear from the public what sanctions they would like to see in lieu of jail time or in addition to jail time given the lower penalties enacted by criminal justice

reform. Commissioner Razo said that he thought the recommendations that came out of the 2015 roundtables had been given short shrift, and that they were great recommendations the Commission should continue to highlight.

Commissioner Claman said he thought it was valuable to hear from victims of all crimes, but that focusing one session on property crime might not give the Commission a realistic view of all victimization happening in Alaska. Judge Rhoades thought that most feedback from victims of property crime would involve criticism of SB 91, while victims of violent crime would have other feedback that could get drowned out.

Commissioner Williams noted that much of the reaction to property crime actually goes to crime processing and resource issues, which is important to hear about but the Commission can't do much about them. He thought this could lead to more frustration. He knew people on the Commission tried to do some public education last fall, but he was not sure those sessions were effective because of the emotion involved. He suggested including clear information on what the Commission does as a way to channel concerns.

Commissioner Claman noted that he had hosted some education sessions in Anchorage's West side, and the attendees at those sessions did not just talk about property crime. He noted that it might be hard to predict what a listening session might be about because social media does not always give an accurate picture. He speculated that if the Commission had hosted a session in October, much of the conversation would have been about sexual assault in reaction to the Justin Schneider case. Commissioner Williams agreed and thought this led back to the need to frame the conversation and manage expectations ahead of time. Judge Rhoades said the Commission should also think about what information it wants to get out of these sessions.

Commissioner Stanfill said that the Commission had spent a lot of time hearing about the issues people face on reentry; equivalent time should be spent listening to those affected by crime. She thought there would be some venting but also thought the Commission could get some good information. In a listening session format, it would be important to hear directly from victims, not the organizations that work with them. Victim services organizations were invited to the roundtables previously, and she thought that because of that some victims felt like their voices hadn't been heard.

Commissioner Case agreed it was important to focus on the intended outcome of these sessions. He was concerned there would be a lot of people on the anti-reform bandwagon. It was important to hear from all voices, but he wondered how the Commission should deal with those expressing desire for harsher prison sentences or criminal justice reform repeal. Commissioner Razo said the Commission would just record and report these sentiments—this was essentially a data gathering exercise. Commissioners Claman and Williams noted that the Commission was a public body and that this would be a way to get more feedback from the public than they typical public comment period at meetings.

Logistics

Commissioner Williams suggested deciding the number and locations of the listening sessions and to go from there.

The Commissioners suggested two dates for Anchorage, Bethel, Nome, Kotzebue, Ketchikan and the Mat-Su. They also noted that the TCC conference in Fairbanks in May might also be a good time and place, and that the Commission would already be in Juneau for its plenary meeting in January. Nome and Kotzebue were on the same flight schedule so that scheduling them together could make sense. Commissioner Razo noted he had contacts in those areas to help with logistics.

Commissioner Williams suggested sending a letter to contacts in the areas where the Commission would like to host a listening session and to ask for an invitation. The local contacts could help facilitate community engagement with the Commission.

Facilitation and education

Barbara asked whether the Commissioners were interested in having these discussions facilitated, similar to the previous roundtables. She explained that the previous facilitator was under contract with Pew/CJI and that her contract may be renewed next year. She agreed to keep the Commissioners updated about whether she might be available.

The Commissioners agreed to begin each session with a presentation of around 30 minutes giving an overview of what the Commission does and what research it has looked at as a way of managing the expectations of attendees.

Commissioner Williams said he had ideas for doing some pre-education before the listening sessions, e.g. a blurb on the local radio. He suggested also sending materials ahead of time so that attendees would not have to absorb all the information in one day.

Next steps

Barbara said she would draw up a draft schedule after checking in with contacts at the identified locations, and would send the draft schedule to the group.