



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

**Department of Law**

Office of the Attorney General

1031 West 4th Avenue, Suite 200  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-5903

Main: 907.269.5100  
Fax: 907.269.5110

June 26, 2014

Via Email to [cindy.chang@usdoj.gov](mailto:cindy.chang@usdoj.gov) & 1<sup>st</sup> Class Mail

Associate Attorney General Tony West  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
RFK Main Justice Building  
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Mr. West:

I want to thank you again for taking the time to visit our state. I know it is a long hike from Washington, DC. On behalf of Commissioner Folger and myself, we appreciated the opportunity to meet with you and your staff to discuss issues of common concern. In terms of specific steps that could be taken in Washington, DC to help address public safety issues affecting Alaska Natives, including our Native youth, I requested an opportunity to submit suggestions in writing. That offer was graciously received by you and your staff and I am taking this opportunity to follow up.

1. *Move the federal formula for funding away from a population-based model.*

The Indian Law and Order Commission (ILOC) report highlighted the unacceptable rates of violence against Native women. Our main state-supported agency, the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, receives formula grants from DOJ that are based on population size. However, as you may now appreciate, Alaska's size and lack of infrastructure poses unique complexities and high costs for service delivery. Despite our compelling need, our relatively small population places us at the bottom of the funding pool. Please consider apportioning funds based on need rather than population.

2. *We need more funding for our tribal courts.*

Again, I do not believe Alaska is receiving its fair share. We have 229 federally recognized tribes. Not all of those tribes have active courts, but there are a significant number that do. As I mentioned during our meeting, we are actively collaborating with tribes to execute Civil Diversion Agreements which will allow state law enforcement to refer various misdemeanor crimes, including domestic violence, to tribal courts for civil

disposition using culturally relevant remedies devised by the tribal court. However, several tribes have told us that their courts lack funding to properly implement the program. Again, I believe our state has been disproportionately underfunded by DOJ (though I hasten to add this has not been intentional nor the result of any discriminatory practices). Many Alaska tribal courts are still developing and may lack the resources to compete for grants. But I do think DOJ needs to look at how these grants are awarded to make sure that Alaska is getting at least a fair share of the pie – especially in light of the challenging public safety landscape I mentioned earlier.

3. *Services for children and domestic violence shelters need to be strengthened.*

I respectfully request that the DOJ consider doing more to fund programs that help child victims. In Alaska, the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault does fund programs for shelter services. However, not every shelter program offers child-specific programming or trauma-informed treatment and behavioral health services. The federal government could complement our effort by providing federal grant opportunities to help fill this unfortunate gap in the provision of child and domestic violence services.

4. *There should be federal dollars available for prevention efforts.*

Right now federal dollars for tribal and state prevention efforts are few and far between. It is difficult to sustain our efforts when the only financial resources available are competitive grants-based programs for correctional, but not preventive, measures. In Alaska we have several prevention programs under the Governor's Choose Respect initiative, including Green Dot, Fourth R, Girls on the Run, and Coaching Boys into Men, among others. I believe additional assistance from the federal government would complement the state's preventive efforts that are underway.

5. *We need support for Village Public Safety Officers.*

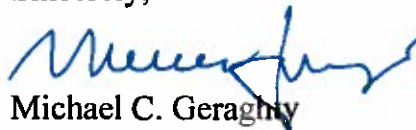
I am afraid I lack familiarity with all the various DOJ grant and assistance programs that may be available to support our Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs). The Governor has made great strides to augment the VPSO force, including a commitment to provide a VPSO to every village and community that wants one. And the Alaska legislature passed a bill this year to allow VPSOs to be armed, which is one of the recommendations that emerged from the ILOC report. But there are still hurdles to bringing VPSOs to every village. The lack of adequate housing is preventing some communities from accepting the Governor's offer to provide a VPSO. The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation has a program to provide some assistance, but more is needed. Improving public safety starts with having a law enforcement officer in the community. While I believe the state has made great strides on this front, this is another area in which the federal government could assist by providing federal funds.

6. *The Office on Violence Against Women should increase its grant funding.*

One of the many barriers to safety for victims of domestic violence is the lack of legal representation. This issue is compounded in rural Alaska due to the small number of attorneys in our rural and remote communities. Civil legal services have been proven to be a leading factor in reducing the likelihood of a victim returning to her perpetrator, and they also provide assistance in keeping or securing housing, obtaining child support, safe visitation arrangements and access to public benefits. Governor Parnell's administration has been providing critical funding for attorney training and pro-bono attorney costs to the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA). ANDVSA has used these funds to provide victims with much needed legal assistance and provide Alaskan attorneys continuing legal education and mentoring in the area of family law. This funding allowed ANDVSA to provide representation in 222 cases during FY13, along with 111 clients who were served by volunteer attorneys providing thousands of hours of volunteer assistance. Despite this effort, ANDVSA is only able to provide services to approximately 50% of clients who complete an application for assistance. ANDVSA has also received an OVW Legal Assistance for Victims grant for several years, but it is our understanding that the next round of competitive grants will now be for three years instead of two – but the dollar amount will not change. Thus, less potential funding will be available. I strongly encourage DOJ to increase the funding available for these competitive grants.

In closing, we are blessed to live in a vast state with abundant natural resources. But we are also confronted by singular challenges in terms of providing services to communities where they are most needed. I know you share this concern, and I look forward to working with the Department of Justice to find ways for us to cooperate in trying to address these issues. Thank you again for taking the time to visit Alaska, and please feel free to call on my office in the future should issues of concern come to your attention.

Sincerely,



Michael C. Geraghty  
Attorney General

cc: The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Mark Begich, U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Congressman Young, U.S. House of Representatives  
Karen Loeffler, U.S. Attorney, U.S. Dept. of Justice  
Kip Knudson, Director of State/Federal Relations, Office of the Governor  
Commissioner Gary Folger, Alaska Dept. of Public Safety