

Rita Anderson, Nome  
Alaska Rural Justice and Law Enforcement Commission  
Nome  
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Thank you. My name is Rita Anderson. I'm a resident of Nome.

Today I will testify as a private citizen and not as a spokesperson for my employer, the Department of Corrections.

It's my understanding that Commissioner Antrum has already testified to the Commission on the Department's behalf. So my opinions and suggestions today that I share with you are my own and result from my work in adult corrections for the past eighteen years.

I'm currently the Superintendent at Anvil Mountain Correctional Center but have also worked there as a Correctional Officer, a Probation Officer and an Assistant Superintendent. I also serve on the Board of the local Domestic Violence Shelter, where Denette Perry testified earlier today, and I've been on that Board for the past seven years. I'm here to share my suggestions for addressing the problem of the increase in the number of inmates from Nome and the Kotzebue Region being incarcerated and the increase of incarceration rates for women.

As you are aware from your work at the Commission, the majority of inmates incarcerated at Anvil Mountain Correctional Center and Seaside Center in Nome, which is our local half way house, are Alaska Native and the majority being at least ninety percent Alaska Native.

Additionally the majority are either under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they commit their crimes or are arrested for alcohol and drug offenses.

I'm often asked what can be done to close the revolving door of repeat offenders. In contemplating this question, I think it is important to understand who we incarcerate in this Region.

From reviewing police sentence reports and speaking with inmates over the past eighteen years, I view many of our inmates as survivors. Many are likely FAFD. Many are survivors of childhood abuse and neglect as children and the majority

have suffered the loss of an inordinate amount of immediate family members through violent deaths and suicides.

While incarcerated, we see a helpful, cooperative, sober side to the people that have victimized their families and communities. The majority of them do not possess the criminal mentality one would normally expect to find in a correctional setting.

I view the majority of our offender population as difficult social problems who victimize their families and members of their community while under the influence of alcohol.

Their needs far exceed the limited substance abuse, mental health, vocational training or life skill classes that could ever be offered at a short term facility like Anvil Mountain Correctional Center.

It is my opinion that \_\_\_\_\_ to jail does little to teach people to be productive members of their communities, but rather go to jail to protect the public, and to provide a general deterrent to already law abiding citizens.

I believe that resources should be placed in prevention. I believe that it is imperative to reach the at-risk teenager and the at-risk young adult. I believe that targeting these groups we'll have the best chance of preventing initial incarceration and the revolving door that all too often follows.

Aside from promoting and expanding positive youth activities in the communities on the Region, it is my belief the Alaska Rural Justice and Law Enforcement Commission should look into the development and support of comprehensive diversion programs and actually \_\_\_\_\_ a little bit.

I believe that the best chance for encouraging pro social, law abiding behavior is in the community.

I believe in extensive inter-prevention programs should be developed at the community level in each village so that people are diverted into services at the first sign of alcohol abuse, drug use excessive behaviors and criminal activity.

I think that Mr. Bioff also spoke to – by the time a person is arrested, they have already kind of been down the path of going to jail and the issue of minor criminal activity being ignored. The best chance for reversing the rising number of people

from the Region from being incarcerated has to occur prior to them establishing entrenched patterns of alcohol abuse; entrenched patterns of drug use, excessive behavior and criminal activity.

It has been my experience that the people – majority of people that come through the doors of Anvil Mountain Correctional Center have been on the path to our facility a long time. In other words, as an individual begins down the path that will eventually lead to their arrest, they have already been or using and abusing alcohol, using drugs, threatening or assaulting their family members or committing crimes for some time.

However on that same path of destruction, opportunities for intervention exists at many points along the way.

A full fledged diversion program could be utilized to intercept those individuals at risk and divert them to treatment, training and other services designed to help them \_\_\_\_\_ responsible to their families and communities, address their substance abuse needs; address training and education needs; encourage the chances of them supporting their families and improve the chances of them being productive members of their community.

In closing, I believe that everything that can be done should be done to reintegrate at risk youth and adults back in their communities as productive community members while they're still there.

Ignoring people who are on the path of destruction will assist those anti-social behaviors becoming so entrenched that they will wake up in jail one day as an inmate and find it very difficult to return to their community and stay there.

Thank you for your time and in allowing me to speak.

BURGESS: Let me ask you a quick question.

And I think I probably know the answer based on your testimony already. But we've heard a lot of testimony regarding concerns about those who are incarcerated being shipped out of the community from which they come to be incarcerated not only to other places around the State, but in many instances outside of the State. And I guess I would be interested in your thoughts on the impact that has on the person who's incarcerated and how important it is to have their family

and friends help them when they get out as well as during their incarceration.

ANDERSON: Absolutely. I think that one of the things that in looking at that phenomenon that sometimes people may forget is the majority of the people that we house at Anvil Mountain Correctional Center are not from Nome. They're from the outlying villages of the Norton Sound Region or they're from the Kotzebue Region. They're not getting visitors to speak of on a regular basis.

So I think that the fact their coming to Nome – that that separation and that gulf that begins to develop between them and their community support system starts right here in this Region because very few of them get visitors.

So the main contact that they would have whether they're at Anvil Mountain or out at Palmer Correctional Center or in Arizona is going to be on the telephone.

So I mean, I guess that's the thing I always think of first and foremost is what kind of contact or support would they be having here if they stayed here and the reality is very few are from Nome, so very few actually are getting any sort of on-going contact with the family members.

BURGESS: What about the type of operation they're going to be in when they're in – especially when their incarcerated? Is it fair to say that it's going to be much different here at Anvil Mountain versus somewhere in Arizona?

ANDERSON: Right. Absolutely. I think one of the best things that has happened in this Region is the fact that there's now a community residential center -- Seaside Center in Nome which basically expands our local capacity to house another 48 inmates.

So that means if it were not for that and up until it opened, there would be a larger number of people being shipped out. So generally we keep a lot more people locally – incarcerated a lot

more people locally who then would have a better chance of reintegrating. As far as – Yes. Definitely.

One of the things that makes Anvil Mountain Correctional Center a unique facility is that its very \_\_\_ in nature as far as our inmates are not as sophisticated and when folks are transferred out to bigger facilities then they are surrounded by more sophisticated criminals and they learn those skills and attitudes. So whether it would be at Palmer or Arizona, I think the \_\_\_\_\_ of things.

BURGESS: Are you certain that would make it much harder for them to reintegrate back into the community if they're spending time \_\_\_\_\_  
....

ANDERSON: Yes. And I would agree with that. The one thing I would like to point out, on any given day our population is mostly unsentenced and it's about half felony and half misdemeanor. Those numbers swing a bit. However, very few actually get sentenced to a long enough term that they're actually transported out of the Region.

For example, a lot of – particularly felons spend a lot of time in pre-trial incarcerated so by the time they're actually sentenced they already have a lot of prior service. So the person gets sentenced for three years for example, for a burglary and let's say he's already spent six years – excuse me, six months awaiting trial. He's already going to get a year of good time. He would have only a year and a half to \_\_\_\_\_ and that person of course we would keep here and then probably try to get him over to a pathway house.

BURGESS: What's your total population?

ANDERSON: Our capacity is 104 and Seaside is 48. Though our average house is more like 109/110. It sways between low 90's to 120. The average is about 10\_\_ Something like that.

BURGESS: Thank you. Any other questions? Commissioner Justin.

JUSTIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You had a statement there where you had said a lot of your inmates are not of the criminal mentality. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you think it's a significant statement in terms of some of the issues we look at \_\_\_\_\_.

ANDERSON: I guess what I mean by that is its certainly not to minimize the crimes that they may have committed or the people that they may have victimized, but as far as the behaviors displayed while incarcerated, and I know Loretta's been in our facility and has had a little bit of contact with our inmates, its really a facility where there's an air of mutual respect. The inmates – We can correct them with very low level corrections as far as simply asking someone to stop doing something versus having to perhaps maybe use the use of force and other bigger facilities or other more sophisticated facilities.

Once folks passed the point of – When they're first booked in, most everyone is intoxicated and then at that point they're probably combative. But once they sober up, they're very respectful and very helpful.

We always receive positive comments about – from visitors – as far as what a clean and well maintained facility that you have. If you have a facility full of inmates that have a more of a criminal mentality, they don't care about their environment. At Anvil Mountain, people do care and it's expressed in how they conduct themselves. So its more of an attitude of they recognize that they're there because they've been arrested and it's up to the judge as to how long they'll be there and it's our job to keep them there until the judge says they can go home. And there's not a lot of conflict and strife between staff and inmates. It's more of a cooperative venture, so to speak.

JUSTIN: I'd like to follow-up on that. I brought the issue up because often times I've heard about public correctional institutions like everybody else in rural Alaska of family members having to have gone through \_\_\_ correctional system. And we get a lot of \_\_\_\_\_. I've heard stories about the....

BURGESS: \_\_\_\_\_

JUSTIN: I'm sorry. We get a lot of stories about how these correctional institutions are very dehumanizing and in many cases having lots of negative effects on the \_\_\_\_\_

And today I say – I can remark – I spoke about how several people have approached me and said one of the things we can do or should do is look at the issue of whether or not -- because of a high percentage of Native inmates in the correctional system we should dedicate a certain percentage of our \_\_\_ towards correctional activities that are culturally relevant so that we can look \_\_\_\_\_ activism rate and that's why I asked you that question because it seemed to me you were touching on some of the attributes that result \_\_\_\_\_ other venues and not \_\_\_\_\_ institutes as you say are not really \_\_\_\_\_ you have much different institutions than you would if you were down in, let's say in Seward or Juneau.

My parting comment is that in your professional estimation is that a valid idea?

ANDERSON: Is what a valid idea?

JUSTIN: A valid idea of looking at a correctional component that's culturally relevant rather than putting all the inmates together in under one roof and place them under the State system.

ANDERSON: I guess it sounds good, what you're saying. But I'm not really – I know that for example in the past, our most recent substance abuse program that we had prior to our funding being cut, tried to be culturally relevant.

And I know that for example, some of the things that we tried to do is for example we have our twice yearly potlatch where we allow Native foods to be brought in. We include, I think, Reindeer on our menu once a month instead of beef as a substitution. So those are very small things.

I think that – The other thing that I would like to share that might explain – that might kind of answer your question and that is when we get inmates and actually staff transferred from

other facilities, but who kind of bring in they're big prison mentality and way of conducting themselves and communicating, we pull them aside and say this isn't Fairbanks; this isn't Seward. I know you've been at Palmer, but you're in Nome now and that's not how you're going to behave yourself. And this is – We'll treat you with respect and we expect the same and let's just get along and not have any problems.

They'll look around and see how business is done and that is that it's a fairly quiet facility compared to the noise and the feeling that you get in the bigger facilities. And I think that I mean in that respect we are reflective of the culture around them which is more reflective of that.

\_\_\_\_\_: What—You said that about ninety percent of your inmates are Native.

ANDERSON: Um hum.

CORBISER: What percentage do you think is female?

ANDERSON: The percentage of females is about – I would say ten to fifteen percent.

CORBISER: And I still guess that a lot of those are going to be substance abuse or alcohol related arrests as well?

ANDERSON: Correct.

CORBISER: What are the other kinds of mental health or counseling opportunities do you provide?

ANDERSON: Our mental health counseling is four hours. We have a contract with Norton Sound Behavioral Health and they provide four hours of behavioral health services per week. So with a population of one hundred at our facility and forty-eight at Seaside, you can do the math, so to speak.

The other aspect that we have that we utilize that's departmental is the – We do telemed: which is, there's a



psychiatrist in Anchorage that we have weekly – our inmates that are on psy-control medications or being considered for that or maybe complaining of depression or ect., they do that once a week. But I think that the basic is four hours. Total. That's not for all inmates. That's four hours divided by 148 inmates.

So basically that is pretty much limited to acute issues. For example, kind of speaking to the suicide issues. Almost on a weekly basis we have an inmate, at least one inmate on a suicide precaution. So most of our mental health services are tied up in reviewing the \_\_\_ issues involving those inmates and then removing them for suicide precautions when it's warranted.

And I – In my initial comments – And I know other people have spoken to it too, regarding the revolving door. But the other disturbing phenomenon is the increase in the number of females that are incarcerated. When I started at Anvil Mountain Correctional Center eighteen years ago, up until maybe five years ago, we would go weeks at a time without having any females in our unit. Now on a daily basis we house ten to twelve and have another half dozen or so at Seaside.

So we're looking at female inmates' everyday.

CORBISER: I'm looking at this in terms of these people as victims as well. I'm guessing probably a lot of it – a lot of the women would be domestic violence victims themselves or sexual abuse of a minor when they were children or domestic violence witnesses. You mentioned FASD too. What do you think the impact would be if instead of four hours, it could be higher correctional population--if it was four hours per week per person where they could address some of their underlying emotional problems?

ANDERSON: I think certainly that would be a great assistance. But I guess I would kind of like to focus on – By the time a person is incarcerated, they've been – they're entrenched in their alcohol abuse; probably committing criminal activities. I think one of the speakers spoke to that, so they're already on that path. And when you've been on that path for two, three or five years and

nobody is saying “hey” let’s get you going down another path. Speaking to Mr. Harrelson’s comment of trying to save that student. And I take the same view of saving the folks from ever entering because once they’re in now their surrounded twenty-four hours a day by like minded people that maybe they don’t have the criminal mentality of some of the other folks in other facilities but they’re surrounded by like minded people that have not been successful in their community.

CORBISER: How often do you get a felony sentence that does require you to send them to another facility either in State or out of State?

ANDERSON: I can’t speak to out of State because we don’t do those here. Typically, they’re sent to another facility first and then they’re shipped out. But I can speak to the ones that would go to Palmer or Seward.

CORBISER: Okay.

ANDERSON: I would say that of the approximately two thousand people that we book in every year, we probably send out maybe one hundred to other facilities in Alaska. I mean some of those may go to Arizona. So kind of looking at that bigger picture is certainly to those families and to those individuals, it’s a big thing. But it’s a very small number.

BURGESS: Ma’am. I’m sorry how long did you say you’ve been in Corrections?

ANDERSON: Eighteen years.

BURGESS: And have you noticed whether or not there’s a changing or a lowering of the age of your population?

ANDERSON: Yes and no. A few years ago legislation changed as to us being able to house juveniles that are charged with serious offenses. So anyone that’s charged with a property offense – On any given day we have one or two juveniles. But generally its been very interesting since we’ve been doing population snapshots for the last five years, our average inmate age is about thirty-two and that has held consistent year after year. That would

mean that a majority of them are eighteen to thirty-five and then there's a few over.

BURGESS: Commissioner Bullard.

BULLARD: I just had a question. I know that they're doing a substantial expansion of the Nome Youth Facility and I'm wondering is that a reflection do you think that there are increases in that population? I mean they're certainly building a much huger facility over there.

ANDERSON: I don't know the answer to that. But its my understanding, its being built more as an alternative to sending people out, so that rather than having -- directing -- reaching the magic number of nine, but typically they would have more twelve, thirteen or fourteen. But they reach nine and they have to ship them out. This way they could keep those five or six locals and protect them from the more serious similarly age criminals in other parts of Alaska.

BURGESS: You can say Anchorage.

ANDERSON: Other parts.

BURGESS: Thank you very much.

ANDERSON: Thank you. And my opinions are my own.

**END OF STATEMENT**