



ALASKA CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

"Walking Alaska's Toughest Beat"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CORRECTIONS OFFICERS ASSOCIATION CALLS FOR LEGISLATIVE INVESTIGATION

Members of the Alaska Correctional Officers Association today called for a legislative investigation into conditions at Alaska's prison facilities. Association officials cited reduced manning on shifts, increased inmate population, unjustified and disproportionate discipline, a failure to hire new Officers, and a dangerous infection which has spread from prisoners to Officers and needs additional attention.

"We feel these are really unsafe conditions for the public and for our members and we aren't afraid of the truth" said union Business Manager Brad Wilson.

Following a 514 to 19 vote of No-Confidence in Commissioner Joe Schmidt by the members state-wide, the Commissioner claimed that the association's claims were untrue and that the association was just against his efforts to clean up the system and institute reforms.

"We fully support the Commissioner's effort to reduce recidivism at our prisons" said Wilson. "We don't know what reforms he is talking about that we don't support."

As for the disciplinary actions the Commissioner has taken, according to Wilson, "The Commissioner cites four terminations of employees. Yes, there were four terminations, but he neglected to mention that two of the four were overturned by arbitrators, the third was settled by the State in favor of the employee, and the fourth is being appealed by the member. We are confident this case will be overturned as well. The overturned terminations cost the State tens of thousands of dollars."

"The primary issue that we are concerned with is the reduction of minimum staff levels at our facilities to dangerously low levels." said Wilson. "If we don't have proper staffing and we have an incident, we won't be able to protect the public, our Officers or the other inmates. And we hear that Management is considering lowering minimum staffing levels even more, even though the prison population has risen by 300 since this Commissioner took office."

Wilson claims that the additional 34 staff that the Commissioner is taking credit for came from the previous administration, and were either already hired or in the pipeline to be hired.

"A legislative review should be able to sort out the truth of all this fairly quickly." Said Wilson. "The public deserves to know what is going on."

The legislature this year authorized an additional 43 Correctional Officers state-wide but they haven't been hired yet. "We are hoping the administration hires all these Officers right away to address the shortage." said Wilson. "In the past, funded positions have gone unfilled."

The union is also concerned with the spread of a drug-resistant bacteria at prison facilities called MRSA. "Our concerns are for the prisoners, Correctional Officers and their families." said Wilson. "We are very concerned that prison medical administration doesn't track the disease." he said. "We feel there needs to be a more determined effort to eliminate it.

"One thing I want to make perfectly clear" said Wilson, "is that we are not doing this to embarrass the Commissioner or the Governor. We supported Governor Palin strongly in the last election. We went to her office twice asking for help. We are prepared to work together with the administration to find solutions to these problems. I think the public expects our correctional institutions to be run in a professional manner."

"We are hopeful that an independent legislative investigation can at least establish the facts and we can go from there." he added. "Our goal, everyone's goal, is safe institutions."

Contact Brad Wilson, ACOA Business Manager at 907-646-2262.