

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senator\_Bill\_Wielechowski@legis.state.ak.us

## SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI

Ralph Samuels, Chairman  
Legislative Budget and Audit Committee  
Alaska State Legislature  
716 W. 4<sup>th</sup> Ave., Suite 630  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Dear Rep. Samuels:

I am writing to request that the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee do a brief audit of the Department of Corrections to verify a number of serious claims recently made in the press by members of the Alaska Correctional Officers Association and members of the Department of Corrections (Department).

Reports have varied widely regarding the number of inmates with the contagious infection called methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA. I have heard reports of Correction Officers who have contracted this infection, which is drug resistant, and then transmitted it to their families. This presents a dangerous health risk to all Alaskans.

Claims regarding understaffing and overcrowding have also been made. If these are true, I fear that we may be creating an unsafe situation for the corrections staff and the general public. I would like to ask your auditors to address the following issues:

1. How has the state prison population increased or decreased in the last 3 years?
2. Has the number of Correction Officers increased or decreased in the last 3 years? If changes to those numbers have been made, when were those decisions made and what methodology was used to make those decisions?
3. Has the Department reduced the minimum level of floor staffing at our corrections facilities? Does the Department plan future reductions in minimum levels of staffing?
4. What is the Department's policy regarding replacement of absent Correction Officers? Do they replace the employee or do they go short handed? Is this policy expected to change in the future?

5. What is the extent of the drug resistant bacteria infection at our corrections institutions? Have Corrections Officers been disciplined for speaking publicly about this issue? Does the Department track the incidence of these infections in prisoners and employees? Are there known instances of Correction Officers, their families or the general public contracting MRSA from inmates?

I am hopeful that this information could be turned around in fairly short order so that we can make some sense of this situation amid vastly conflicting claims of the truth. The legislature showed its concern for these conditions when it authorized 43 new corrections officers in the budget this year.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,  
Senator Bill Wielechowski