



PRESS RELEASE

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ACOA/Correctional Officers/Public Excluded from DOC Commissioner's Decision

This morning the Department of Corrections announced the closure of the Palmer Correctional Center. The Commissioner also indicated in the press that he had been in “*regular dialogue about these scenarios*” with the Alaska Correctional Officers Association (ACOA); this is inaccurate. ACOA heard rumors of potential closures and requested to meet with the Commissioner to discuss these rumors. In two separate meetings on July 1 and July 7 the Commissioner clearly stated that no decisions had been made on closing any institutions and that Correctional Officers and ACOA would be part of the vetting process.

ACOA tried to schedule more meetings to receive information, but was continuously put off. Then, this morning, without warning and without having been given the opportunity to provide input, ACOA read that Palmer Correctional Center would be closed. The Commissioner stated that he wanted Officers and the public involved in the decision, then acted behind closed doors and without taking input on the closure. Now he is asking for input from Officers on how to enact his unilateral decision.

Correctional Officers, just like all State employees, deserve to know what is happening with their jobs. That is why the Legislature thoroughly vets any cuts before they are made to a Department. Today's announcement completely circumvents the Legislative and public process.

“Despite telling Officers that the decisions would be transparent, the Commissioner put off Correctional Officers for weeks saying that they were ‘not sure’ and ‘no decisions have been made’ and then surprised all Officers today by announcing that Palmer Correctional Center was closing.”

- Brad Wilson, ACOA Business Manager

As far as we know, no cost analysis has been seen by the Legislature or the Public. This is a short-sighted decision which will have a long-lasting, negative cost impact on the Department of Corrections.

Closing Palmer Correctional Center is Counterproductive to the State's Efforts to Reduce Recidivism

Palmer Correctional Center provides vocational programming and various educational opportunities for prisoners, which will not necessarily be available at the institutions where inmates will be forced to move. These programs provide inmates with the job and life skills necessary to find employment after being released, a difficult undertaking for a parolee, yet one that is crucial for successful rehabilitation and reintegration. Program opportunities available to Palmer Correctional Center inmates include, but are not limited to:

- Carpentry
- Welding
- Iron Working
- Farm Workers
- Electrical Apprenticeship Programs
- Small Engine Repair Classes
- Commercial Driver's License Training
- Culinary Arts Training
- Adult Basic Education
- GED Courses
- Computer Aided Design
- Residential Substance Abuse Treatment
- Intensive Outpatient Substance Abuse Treatment
- Transitional Living Community (TLC) Faith Based Habilitation Program
- Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response Training Class

Other important life skills programs include:

- Anger Management Training
- Family Violence Intervention Training
- Criminal Attitudes Training
- Sex Offender Rehabilitation
- Reentry Programing
- English as a Second Language (ESL)
- Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) Training and Certification Program

The Palmer Correctional Center closure should be vetted by the public and the Legislature.

"The closing of Palmer Correctional Center warrants additional consideration, and Correctional Officers, Legislators, and the Palmer community should be involved."

- Brad Wilson, ACOA Business Manager