



October 28, 2019

Governor Mike Dunleavy
Alaska State Capitol, 3rd Floor
PO Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Governor Dunleavy,

Improving the safety of all Alaskans is an issue that we can all get behind. Everyone has the right to feel safe in their home and their community, no matter where in Alaska they live. The creators of our constitution felt so strongly about this and agreed that it needed to be explicitly stated in the constitution. However, despite these founding statements upon which our State of Alaska government is built, and all the discussion focused on public safety last year, funding was still cut from the Village Public Safety Officer program, and we are not seeing improvements in public safety for ALL Alaskans.

Only one in three villages have a public safety officer. Alaska continues to shamefully rank highest for rates of domestic violence, assault and missing and murdered Indigenous women in the Nation. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that murder is the third-leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native women and that rates of violence on reservations and rural areas can be up to ten times higher than the national average.

As we talk with people in communities across Alaska, we are overwhelmed by the expressed concerns for life and safety, and the testimonies of rural residents who had to wait hours (and in some cases up to days) for troopers to respond to distress calls. It has been up to community members without any formal safety and mediation training to police others and respond to calls of distress of their family and friends putting themselves at great risk as well – this is not a system that serves us well and we demand better.

A better system includes working more closely with our tribal governments, building up and truly supporting our Village Public Safety Officers by providing adequate funding and removing barriers that exist to hinder this program from protecting Alaskans. We know there are recruitment and retention problems for public safety officers across Alaska, as acknowledged in recent years by Commissioner Walt Monegan. He listed multiple reasons preventing successful officer recruitment and retention, including but not limited to salary and benefit packages. While we understand the challenge of balancing a budget and eliminating the deficit, we also know that the solution is not to cut funding for public safety. There are times when investments need to be made for the greater good, and this is one of those times. All options and out of the box solutions should be on the table.

We cannot continue to fail to protect Alaskans. One of our main goals is to advocate for the wellness and protection of Alaska Native peoples. We need partners across the state from the Governor's office to troopers and police, to non-profits, tribal governments and communities to come together to find the solutions to make Alaska a safer place.

We are reaching out to seek your assistance and leadership in helping us to address these issues. We need to end the high rates of violence and lack of public safety and protections for Alaskans across the state, and to stand up for Alaska Native women and children who are going missing and being murdered. Collectively we need to send a clear message that this norm will no longer be tolerated and we will do everything we can do end it.



We urge you to include funding in the state operating budget to support the needs of Village Public Safety Officers and review the statutes that govern them to ensure any existing barriers to their success are removed.

We appreciate your consideration and hope that we can work together to solve this crisis. Please do not hesitate to contact us, we stand ready and able to help in any way possible.

Gunalchéesh/Háw'aa/Quyana/Mahsi'/Baassee'/Maasee'/Dogedinh/Thank you,

Kendra Kloster

Kendra Kloster
Executive Director
Native Peoples Action