



Crime and Safe Communities

My work as an assistant district attorney taught me that unless Alaska's citizens feel safe and secure in their homes, work places and public places, then our public safety system has not done its job. A basic premise of the system is that individuals must be held accountable for their actions. At the same time, it would be short-sighted to not look for ways to prevent crime from happening in the first place. Striking the right balance between punitive measures for those who deserve them and other approaches that work to reduce crime or rehabilitate offenders is the goal. I believe the work that I have done in this area demonstrates my commitment to these principles.

The first bill I passed as a legislator increased the sentences for repeat sex offenders. Previously, our sentencing laws did not account for the type of crime a two-time offender may have committed previously. It was not hard to convince my fellow legislators that we should treat a two-time sex offender more punitively than someone who was first convicted of, say, car theft, and then convicted for a sex offense.

I have also long been interested in the need for better data integration in the fight against crime. Getting the half-dozen different databases that police, court, and prosecuting agencies maintain to 'talk' to one another is critical in a state as large as ours. I've pushed for and secured appropriations to help speed this effort along. Simple things like the conditions of bail that a defendant is subject to upon release from jail before trial must be available to patrol officers in the field, or a judge's orders can be ignored or not enforced. A bill I sponsored helped make this happen.

In 2008, as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I organized a Crime Summit that brought together law enforcement, court, prosecuting, and treatment professionals from around the state. One key learning moment came from Steve Aos, from Washington state, whose work in evidence based crime fighting efforts has attracted national attention. Mr. Aos has been able to put into numbers what many of us intuitively suspect: that small amounts of money spent



preventing crime and rehabilitating criminals lowers the crime rate, reduces prison populations, and saves money.

That year I helped steer \$50,000 to our own Institute of Social and Economic Research, to conduct a similar study here in Alaska. Their report, available here, has spurred greater legislative interest in investments in rehabilitative measures.

Combating Alaska's shameful rates of sex assault and sex abuse of a minor is something I will continue to do as long as I hold public office. A day-long meeting of the Judiciary Committee recently demonstrated that this problem requires more study in order to determine the exact scope of the problem, more trained nurses to help build prosecutable cases, more thorough police work up front, and more services to those who are victimized.

Other crime related efforts I've been involved in include serving on the board of Victims for Justice, and on the 2007 Village Public Safety Officer Task Force. The task force visited Bethel, Emmonak, Mountain Village, Nome, Gambell and Savoonga. We recommended an increase in the wages for VPSO's and that increase was awarded in the 2008 legislative session.

Making Alaska safer will take a sustained effort. I'm ready to do it.