

# CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

## 2009 Annual Report



# Alaska

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Mission and Mandate .....                       | 2  |
| Mission.....                                    | 2  |
| Mandate for the Group.....                      | 2  |
| Duties Assigned to the Group.....               | 2  |
| Duties Assigned to OCS Related to the CRP ..... | 3  |
| Membership and Staff Support .....              | 4  |
| Meetings and Activities .....                   | 5  |
| Recommendations.....                            | 9  |
| Commendations .....                             | 20 |

## Mission and Mandate

---

### MISSION

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP) is committed to reviewing and evaluating the practices and procedures of the Office of Children's Services (OCS) and in making recommendations relative to its findings to insure the safety and the well-being of the children of Alaska.

The CRP will achieve this commitment by examining the policies and procedures of the Office of Children's Services and collaborating agencies; examining, where appropriate, specific cases; evaluating the extent to which agencies are carrying out their child protection responsibilities; and preparing and making available to the public an annual report.

---

### MANDATE FOR THE GROUP

The Citizens' Review Panel (CRP) is federally mandated through the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA); Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003. The CRP is also mandated through Alaska statute Sec. 47.14.205.

“By allowing the Panels to have complete access to child protection cases, by requiring Panels to publicize their findings, and by requiring states to respond to criticisms and recommendations of the Panels, the Committee intends to subject states to public criticism and political repercussion if they fail to protect children.” (United States Congress, House Report 104-081, 1995, p.1)

---

### DUTIES ASSIGNED TO THE GROUP

**Summary of duties** The CRP shall examine the policies, procedures, and practices of State and local agencies and where appropriate, specific cases, to evaluate the extent to which State and local child protection system agencies are effectively discharging their child protection responsibilities.

## CRP duties

- Evaluate OCS compliance with federal and state laws, examine policies and procedures for consistent statewide implementation, review cases with fatalities or near fatalities. The CRP shall evaluate the extent to which OCS is effectively discharging its child protection responsibilities under:
  1. the State Plan submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under 42 U.S.C. 5106a(b);
  2. Child Protection Standards under federal and state laws; and
  3. any other criteria that the CRP considers important to ensuring the protection of children, including the level and efficiency of coordination of foster care and adoption programs in the state and a review of child fatalities and near fatalities.

In carrying out the responsibilities listed above, the CRP shall examine the policies, procedures, and practices of OCS, and, where appropriate, evaluate specific cases of child abuse or neglect.
- Maintain confidentiality. A person attending a CRP meeting or a CRP member or CRP staff may not make any disclosure related to information obtained during a review by the CRP. A violation is subject to a civil penalty of up to \$2,500 for each violation.
- Conduct public outreach. The CRP shall conduct public outreach and gather public comment on current OCS procedures and practices involving children and family services.
- Produce an annual report. The CRP shall prepare and make available to the governor, the legislature, and the public an annual report containing a summary of its activities and recommendations for the improvement of child protection services in the state.
- Meet at least every three months. The CRP is required by law to meet every three months. Additional meetings and/or teleconferences are scheduled as needed.

---

### DUTIES ASSIGNED TO OCS RELATED TO THE CRP

HSS support. The Commissioner shall, by regulation, establish policies and procedures necessary to carrying out the duties of the CRP.

- Cooperation with state panel. OCS shall provide the panel access to information on child abuse or neglect cases that is necessary for the CRP to carry out its duties.
- Report response. Not later than six months after the date on which the report is released, OCS shall submit a written response that describes whether or how OCS will incorporate the recommendations of the CRP (where appropriate) to make *measurable* progress in improving the child protection system.

## Membership and Staff Support

**Required membership** The panel shall be composed of volunteer members who are broadly representative of the state, including members who have expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect.

### Current membership

Fred Van Wallinga, Chair, Willow  
Carol Olson, Vice Chair, Anchorage  
Pamela Dupras, Kodiak  
Dana W. Hallett, Soldotna  
Arthur S. Hansen, Fairbanks  
Susan Heuer, Anchorage  
Kristin Hull, Wasilla  
Ralph Taylor, Eagle River

### Former members who left the group during this reporting period

Paul Burke, Nome  
Esperanza Redelfs, Ketchikan

**Desired membership** The CRP would like to meet its requirement to be broadly representative of the state by widening the geographic and racial and ethnic diversity of the membership. The group is working to recruit new members from underrepresented areas of the state as well as a greater diversity of child-centered expertise and backgrounds.

**OCS liaison** Tammy Sandoval, Director, is the current liaison between OCS and the CRP.

**Staff support** Staff support is provided by Sylvan Robb and Nancy Lowe of Information Insights.

## Meetings and Activities

### Group meetings

|                    |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| July 10, 2008      | In person — Anchorage |
| September 17, 2008 | Teleconference        |
| November 11, 2008  | Teleconference        |
| November 21, 2008  | In person — Anchorage |
| February 4-6, 2009 | In person — Juneau    |
| March 26, 2009     | Teleconference        |
| May 1, 2009        | In person — Anchorage |
| May 26, 2009       | Teleconference        |
| June 2, 2009       | Teleconference        |
| June 19, 2009      | Teleconference        |
| June 29, 2009      | Teleconference        |

### Other activities

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| August 28, 2008     | Fairbanks: Art Hansen, Fred Van Wallinga, and Sylvan Robb met with Representative John Coghill and his Chief of Staff, Rynnieva Moss |
| September 10, 2008  | Participated in teleconference for the Child and Family Services Review  |
| November 18, 2008   | Fairbanks: Art Hansen and Sylvan Robb met with Coleen Turner, Children's Services Manager for Northern Regional Office               |
| November 20, 2008   | Met with Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Commissioner, Bill Hogan  |
| January 6, 2009     | Safety training teleconference with Director Tammy Sandoval  |
| January 7, 2009     | Dillingham: Art Hansen and Susan Heuer met with local OCS staff and partnering agencies  |
| January 8-9, 2009   | King Salmon: Art Hansen and Susan Heuer met with local OCS staff and partnering agencies   |
| January 12-13, 2009 | St. Mary's: Dana Hallett and Kristin Hull met with local OCS staff and partnering agencies   |

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| January 18-21, 2009 | Unalaska: Dana Hallett and Sylvan Robb met with local OCS staff and partnering agencies        |
| January 28, 2009    | Bethel: Pamela Dupras and Fred Van Wallinga met with local OCS staff and partnering agencies   |
| January 29-30, 2009 | Aniak: Pamela Dupras and Fred Van Wallinga met with local OCS staff and partnering agencies    |
| April 27-30, 2009   | Alaska Native Indian Child Welfare Agency, Second Annual Alaska Child Welfare Summit           |
| May 14, 2009        | Sylvan Robb presented to the Tribal State Consortium   |
| May 20-22, 2009     | Jackson Hole, Wyoming: Fred Van Wallinga attended the National Citizen Review Panel conference |

### **Annual activities**

Although the CRP was formed in May 2002, the core of its current membership has been in place for approximately five years. The group meets face-to-face quarterly, with monthly teleconferences in between. Panel membership has remained steady this year with eight members, although there were extended absences during the year. Two members missed a portion of the year; one for health reasons and the other due to military deployment. One member resigned when she moved out-of-state. A newly recruited member had to resign due to a family medical emergency before becoming very active. Another new member was recruited and has been an active participant for much of the year.

The CRP continued to focus this year on two areas for which we had previously advocated. The CRP visited the Copper River Basin area in November 2007. We had serious concerns about this area before and after our site visit. The local OCS field office in Glennallen was a one-person office and struggled to retain a staff person. We have continued to monitor the progress and keep a close eye on the office. We were extremely encouraged to see the community rally and organize to start a child advocacy center (CAC) for the area. OCS was responsive to the needs of the area and the acknowledged additional staff time required by the creation of the CAC. A second staff person has been assigned to the field office. The office suffered an unfortunate set back when the newly hired staffer was seriously injured in a car accident. OCS has been very responsive to the needs of the region and recently promptly filled that position with a new worker in the interim.

Our second area of focus has been, and continues to be, the creation of a fifth service region for OCS to be headquartered in the Bethel area. That was our most important

recommendation in our annual report last year and is a recommendation again this year. More information is included in the recommendations section of this report.

As more people become aware of our existence we receive more calls from dissatisfied citizens. As in the past, we inform people that we do not intervene in individual cases, but encourage people to avail themselves of either the OCS grievance process or to open a case with the Ombudsman's Office. When we are aware of cases, we do try to monitor complaints with an eye out for patterns of problems.

We collected a great deal of regional data personally through community site visits. We interviewed local OCS staff and staff from the following types of partnering agencies regarding what is working and what needs improvement in their relationship with OCS and how we can help facilitate those efforts.

- Counseling center staff
- District attorneys
- Foster parents
- Health aides & public health nurses
- Health clinic staff
- ICWA workers
- Local police departments
- Municipal representatives
- OCS staff
- School principals, nurses & counselors
- State troopers
- Tribal representatives
- WIC workers

We also learned a great deal from other people in these same job types during discussions at several conferences we attended. One conference we attended was the Second Annual Alaska Child Welfare Summit put on by the Alaska Native Indian Child Welfare Association (ANICWA). Attendance at these conferences provides extremely valuable networking opportunities, especially to hear from rural residents from many communities. Conference attendance is an excellent way to continue to make people aware of our existence. A 3' by 6' banner with our name and logo was purchased, and we were able to staff a table with information during the ANICWA conference. Unfortunately, attendance was down this year as travel budgets have been cut or frozen due to the poor economy.

We had additional training opportunities this year to include one member attending the National Citizen Review Panel Conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Attendance at the national conference allows us to learn of any legislative changes that impact citizen review panels and to network with members from other states to exchange ideas. We are active participants in the national listserv for CRPs. We have responded to data requests

as well as submitting several questions to solicit information from the national community of CRPs.

In addition to collecting data, we also provided data this year. We attended a teleconference to provide input on the Child and Family Services Review conducted by the federal Children's Bureau. One of our members, Art Hansen, also participated in an in-person meeting and several teleconferences related to this process. We look forward to monitoring OCS' progress towards the goals laid out in the Performance Improvement Plan. We also provided feedback to OCS for the mandatory five-year plan they submitted to the federal government.

Director Tammy Sandoval has been our OCS liaison for the entire year. We have been pleased with the direct communication and access this affords us. The relationship and outcomes have improved between OCS and the CRP. In addition to her involvement in our quarterly meetings, Director Sandoval also provided us with a half-day tutorial on the Safety Assessment which is a new practice being implemented throughout the state.

As part of our public outreach we presented testimony to the Alaska House Health and Social Services Committee about our activities and recommendations. While in Juneau we also met with members of the Governor's staff, the Commissioner of Health and Social Services and numerous individual legislators. We also continue to maintain our website for public outreach at [www.crpalaska.org](http://www.crpalaska.org).

At our May meeting, we held officer elections and Susan Heuer was elected as our new chair. Carol Olson was re-elected as vice chair.

## Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1. That resources for state departments be standardized**

Currently there are many resources that are available in numerous state departments that are not standardized. We acknowledge and agree that not all departments have the same needs nor do they require being treated the same in all circumstances. However, if Alaska values the safety of its children it will not prolong the time it allows the Office of Children's Services to continually be under-resourced.

In nearly every rural community we visited, we have heard of the problems plaguing OCS offices related to slow Internet connections. This is not a matter of convenience, as some may imagine it; the horrifically slow Internet connections endured by these offices has a tremendous impact on productivity. Workers in rural offices can spend 20 minutes doing something that takes two to three minutes in an office with a decent connection.

One result of these very slow connections is to impact the safety and outcomes for children as workers have less time to provide services to children and families. While that alone should be enough to motivate a remedy to the situation, directly jeopardizing the safety of children is not the only impact. Due to the overwhelming amount of time needed to enter data into OCS' ORCA database in offices with these tremendously slow connections, workers tend to get quite behind with their entries. This leads to a substantial lag between the data in ORCA and the reality on the ground. Since OCS is admirably trying to make decisions based on data, ORCA is frequently mined for data to inform decisions. However, those decisions are then made based on outdated data.

Another example of the impact this has on children could be witnessed during a recent termination trial. An OCS supervisor from Bethel was called as a witness and the Attorney General was asking her questions based on ORCA entries. Her testimony lasted four hours when it should have been 45 minutes. The long lapses allowed previously unprepared defense attorneys time to prepare and left the supervisor feeling frustrated and unprofessional. Even though it was not her fault, the delay left a bad impression of OCS's expertise on the court. Additionally, it wasted three hours of the supervisor's time.

The most frustrating part of this scenario is that in nearly all the communities we have visited where we heard of these exceedingly slow Internet connections, we have found other offices of state government to be connected at the highest speeds. OCS should not always be provided with the slowest connection. We understand that this problem requires remedy by those outside of OCS in other state agencies. We have faith that these agencies too will value Alaska's children's safety and work with OCS to find a solution to this issue. OCS workers have jobs with plenty of inherent challenges; they

don't need to endure this maddening one while knowing that the school, the Trooper's office, and the public health nurses all have faster connections.

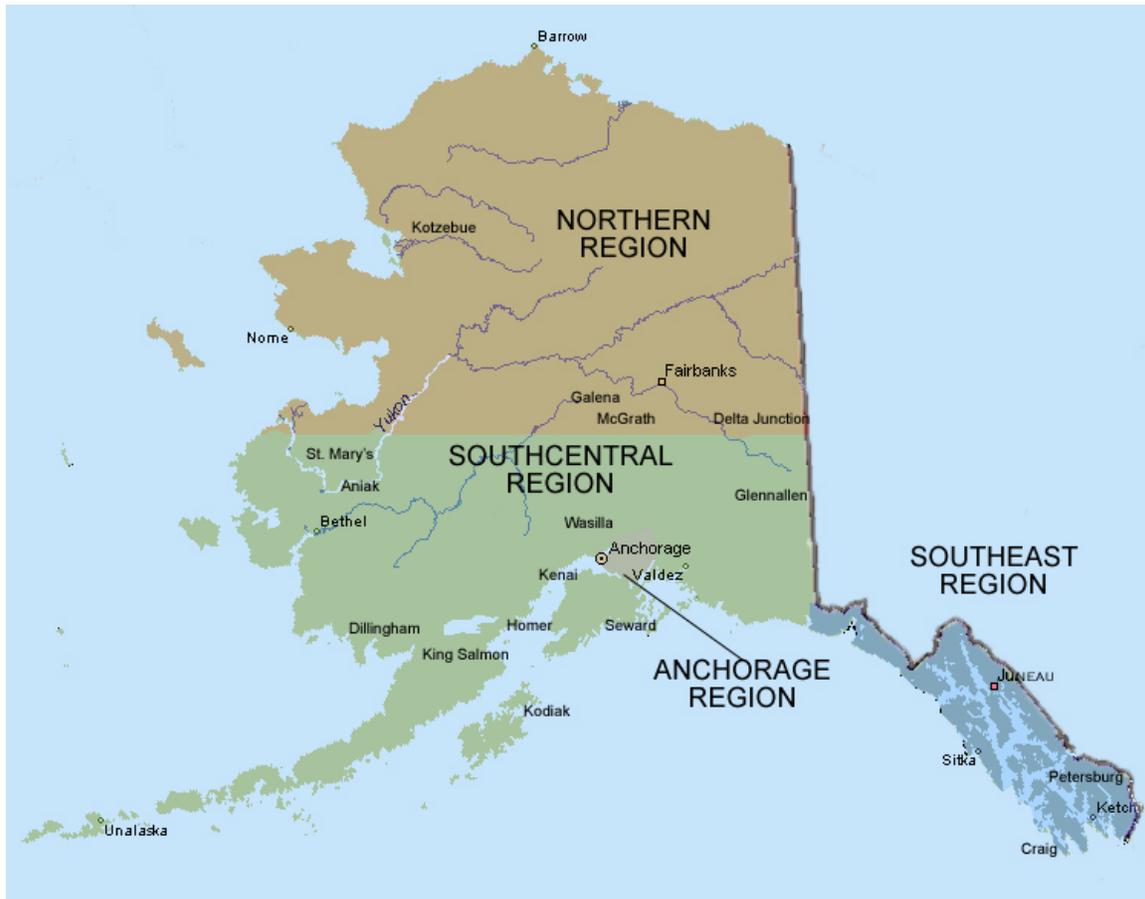
The other resource that is available to some state agencies as a recruitment tool for rural workers is housing. Schools and Troopers in some rural communities have recognized that being able to offer decent housing makes it much easier to recruit qualified workers to remote communities. OCS would like to be able to use this recruiting tool as well since attracting applicants to rural positions is difficult. We hope this issue can be explored. Since the model already exists in other departments, the issue seems one of funding rather than figuring logistics or having to pilot a project.

While our immediate desire is to see OCS receive the same quality Internet connection as other offices and the same recruiting tools, we think the state is missing an opportunity to save money by consolidating these services. In the same way that all state agencies must book travel through the state travel office, all state agencies in a community should share an Internet connection. Likewise, all agencies could share state housing in a community for recruiting purposes. We feel this has the potential to raise the caliber of everything being offered by various agencies. Better services would decrease frustration, improve employee retention, and improve the delivery of state services.

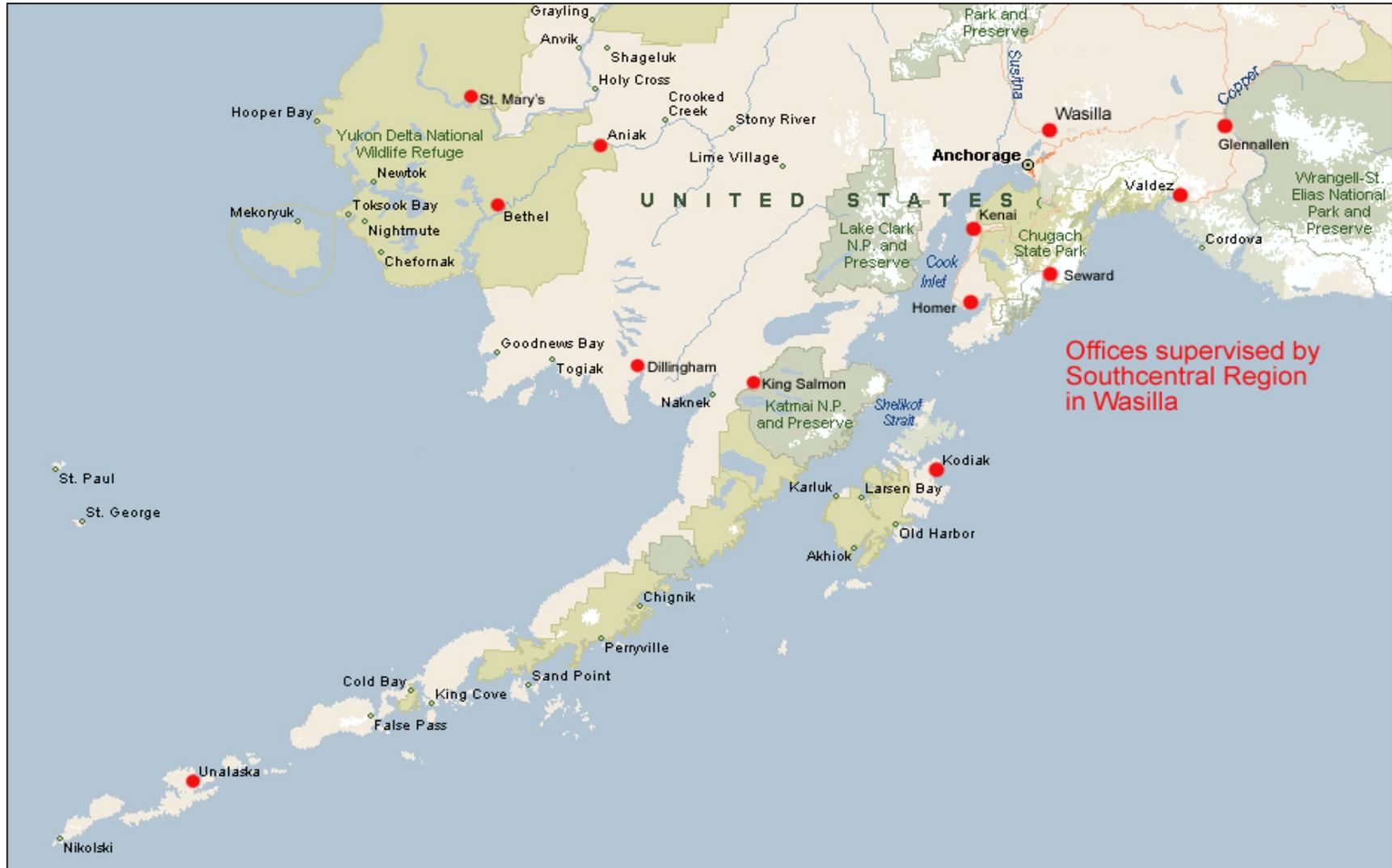
**Recommendation 2. That OCS continue to work toward having a fifth service region headquartered in Bethel**

Population and Land Area

Currently OCS serves the state through four regions: Southeast, Anchorage, the Northern region (which includes the area north of St. Mary's) and the Southcentral region (which is the remainder of the state). The map below shows the existing regions.



Currently there is one office in the Anchorage region, five offices in the Southeast region, seven offices in the Northern region and 13 offices in the Southcentral region. The existing Southcentral region has 12 field offices which is twice as many as the region with the next largest number of field offices—six in the Northern region--and three times as many field offices as Southeast (which has four field offices). The following map shows the dozen field offices in the Southcentral region and the regional headquarters in Wasilla.



We propose that in order to better serve the sizable and culturally distinct area of Southwest Alaska, OCS create a fifth region to be headquartered in Bethel. This region would be broken out from the existing Southcentral region (SCRO). The existing Southcentral region includes 37% of Alaska's land area and 30% of its population. SCRO as it exists is the size of California and Michigan combined.

In our annual report last year we also advocated strongly that OCS develop a fifth service region. Last year we advocated carving off six of the field offices from the existing SCRO—Aniak, Bethel, Dillingham, King Salmon, St. Mary's and Unalaska. We continue to feel passionately that creating a fifth service region will allow OCS to provide better services in both the new region and in SCRO--which would be much smaller after the creation of the new region. After making our recommendation in last year's annual report, we had the opportunity to travel to all six field offices that we proposed for inclusion in the new fifth region.

After meeting with OCS workers and community partners in all six communities, we are amending our recommendation this year. The fifth region we propose would be headquartered in Bethel and would include the Bethel, Aniak and St. Mary's field offices. While the inclusion of the six offices proposed last year makes sense geographically, the inclusion of all six communities does not make sense when travel routes are considered. As the crow flies, it is 850 miles from Wasilla to Unalaska and only 510 miles from Bethel to Unalaska. However, the only route between Unalaska and Bethel travels through Anchorage, so serving Unalaska and other communities on the Anchorage travel corridor from Bethel does not make sense. However, we continue to believe that the 56 Yup'ik villages in the Bethel area—a culturally cohesive area and an area with many challenges - deserves to be served from a region headquartered in the area.

The table below lists all the boroughs and census areas included in the existing Southcentral region. Those areas above the heavy line would remain in the Southcentral region after the proposed Southwest region is created. Those below the heavy line would be in the proposed Southwest region. The existing boundary between the Northern region and SCRO is a straight line east-west across the state, so it does not follow borough or census area boundaries. We have estimated the percentage of the census areas in the proposed Southwest region for those census areas bisected by the boundary.

| <b>Borough or Census Area</b>          | <b>Population (2006 Census Bureau est.)</b> | <b>% Population Under 5 Years Old</b> | <b>% Population Under 18 Years Old</b> | <b>Land Area (sq. miles)</b> |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Aleutians East Borough                 | 2,647                                       | 3.5                                   | 12.1                                   | 6,988                        |
| Aleutians West Census Area             | 5,239                                       | 3.2                                   | 12.8                                   | 4,397                        |
| Bristol Bay Borough                    | 1,042                                       | 6.5                                   | 27.0                                   | 505                          |
| Dillingham Census Area                 | 4,970                                       | 8.7                                   | 33.6                                   | 18,675                       |
| Lake and Peninsula Borough             | 1,548                                       | 8.1                                   | 31.2                                   | 23,782                       |
| Kenai Peninsula Borough                | 52,304                                      | 5.8                                   | 24.7                                   | 16,013                       |
| Kodiak Island Borough                  | 13,072                                      | 7.7                                   | 30.0                                   | 6,560                        |
| Matanuska-Susitna Borough              | 80,480                                      | 6.4                                   | 26.2                                   | 24,682                       |
| Valdez-Cordova Census Area             | 9,872                                       | 6.2                                   | 24.7                                   | 34,319                       |
| <b>Bethel Census Area</b>              | <b>17,147</b>                               | <b>11.2</b>                           | <b>37.1</b>                            | <b>40,633</b>                |
| <b>Wade Hampton Census Area</b>        | <b>6,443*</b>                               | <b>13.7</b>                           | <b>42.4</b>                            | <b>14,614*</b>               |
| <b>Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area</b>       | <b>877**</b>                                | <b>6.5</b>                            | <b>27.9</b>                            | <b>21,885**</b>              |
| <b>Total current SCRO</b>              | <b>201,745</b>                              | <b>7.0</b>                            | <b>27.3</b>                            | <b>213,053</b>               |
| <b>Total proposed Southwest region</b> | <b>24,467</b>                               | <b>11.7</b>                           | <b>38.2</b>                            | <b>77,132</b>                |
| <b>Total remaining SCRO</b>            | <b>177,278</b>                              | <b>6.2</b>                            | <b>25.6</b>                            | <b>135,921</b>               |
| <b>Alaska</b>                          | <b>670,053</b>                              | <b>7.4</b>                            | <b>27.1</b>                            | <b>571,951</b>               |

\* Estimate 85% of Wade Hampton Census Area in proposed Southwest region, figure is 85% of total.

\*\* Estimate 15% of Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area in proposed Southwest region, figure is 15% of total.

The proposed Southwest region would have 4% of Alaska's population, although it would contain 2% of Alaska's children under 18 years old. While the population in the proposed new region is not sizable, 38% of that population is children. The proposed Southwest region would also include 14% of Alaska's land area. This would leave the remaining SCRO with 26% of Alaska's population, 24% of Alaska's children under 18 years old and 24% of Alaska's land area.

The proposed Southwest region has a large number of communities. There are at least 56 villages in the Bethel region. All of those communities are substantially closer to Bethel than to Wasilla in many ways. The communities are geographically closer, culturally closer, and much closer in lifestyle being all off-road small, rural communities.

#### Great Need—Troubled Region

As reported in the Anchorage Daily News article, *Slowly, Western Alaska starts to break silence on sexual abuse, Children are often victims of relatives* by Alex DeMarban of the Tundra Drums, Bethel has more sexual assaults than Anchorage in absolute numbers (not per capita). This article was published on January 22, 2008. A portion of the article is excerpted below.

#### EPICENTER: BETHEL

New statistics from the Alaska State Troopers suggest that Western Alaska leads the state in cases of sexual abuse of a minor -- often when girls are raped or molested by intoxicated adult male relatives and acquaintances -- and cases of sexual assaults against women.

A soon-to-be released study of 989 such cases investigated statewide by troopers in 2003 and 2004 shows that the greatest number -- 476 cases, or 48 percent -- occurred in Western Alaska, said Katie TePas, a troopers program coordinator.

The region is immense -- containing more than one-third of the state's land mass -- and stretches from Kotzebue in the north to Kodiak in the south and out the Aleutian Chain past Unalaska. It's served by 13 trooper posts in what's known as the C Detachment.

But the population is small, represented by dozens of villages -- many with fewer than 500 people -- and a handful of hub communities, such as Kodiak, Bethel or Nome, each with fewer than 6,000 people.

In the vastly more populated regions along the road system -- including Anchorage, Fairbanks and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough -- troopers investigated fewer such cases during the two-year period. Combined, trooper posts in those areas investigated 299 of the studied cases, or 30.2 percent of the total during the two-year period.

Ground zero is the Bethel region, where troopers investigated 17 percent of the cases, more than any other post in the state, TePas said.

"We have an epidemic," she said. "It's a statewide epidemic, but the epicenter, our data shows, is the Bethel region."

#### CHILDREN MOST VULNERABLE

TePas presented the numbers at a summit on Alaska Native child sexual abuse in Anchorage earlier this month.

The results are highlights from an 102-page study done by the Justice Center at the University of Alaska Anchorage, she said.

Only trooper cases that entered the justice system during the two-year period and reached a conclusion -- cases that did and did not result in a conviction -- are included in the study, TePas said.

The early figures paint a disturbing picture of rapes and other sexual violence against adults and children in Western Alaska, where the population is largely Alaska Native and villages are often loose extensions of family.

In all the 989 cases, family members and friends sexually abuse or assault each other in more than 90 percent of the incidents, she said.

They're especially hurting children. The most common charge during the two years was second-degree sexual abuse of a minor, a class B felony that generally means the rape or other molestation of someone 16 years old or younger, often by an adult.

Almost one-fourth of the child victims were from ages 13 to 15, she said. Nearly the same number were from ages 6 to 12.

Strangers were the perpetrators in less than 1 percent of the cases involving children, TePas said.

#### Precedent in Other Agencies

There are other state agencies that have more than four regions. The best example is that the Alaska State Troopers divide the state into five detachments (A-E) headquartered in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Ketchikan, Palmer and Soldotna. They have posts in 36 communities. The Troopers are the best agency for OCS to compare itself to because both agencies share a need to be able to respond quickly in emergency situations. Safety requires proximity. Additionally, knowing the community can provide a great benefit in allowing workers to diffuse situations and find the most appropriate outcome. Workers in both agencies need to be culturally competent and familiar with the local services. While the Troopers' detachment C does not mirror exactly the proposed Southwest region, the areas are similar. This arrangement works well for the Troopers and would work well for OCS. With the Troopers being a primary partner for OCS, it makes good sense to have this region to strengthen the partnership between these agencies.

#### Community Support

Prior to our testimony before the House Health, Education, and Social Services we

received letters from residents and agencies in the Bethel area in support of keeping the Supervisor 5 position in Bethel and for the creation of a new region. We received 15 letters of support which may be viewed in their entirety on our website.

### Conclusion

There are many strong reasons for creating this new region.

- The area is 14% of Alaska. If it were a state, it would be the eighteenth largest state just behind South Dakota, but ahead of Washington.
- The area is entirely off the road system, complicating travel and creating different circumstances than on-road communities face.
- The area has a higher percentage of population who are children than the state overall.
- The area has a great need having the highest rates of sexual assault.
- The area is culturally distinct due to the large, strong Yup'ik population.
- The Alaska State Troopers, who also provide public safety, serve the state through five regions.
- The community supports the effort.
- The OCS offices and staff are already in place. Only four new positions need to be added.

In addition to serving this culturally distinct area that comprises 14% of Alaska much better, removing responsibility for this area would allow the currently over-stretched SCRO to provide better services to all those children and families remaining in its area. SCRO has many challenges and would greatly benefit from having less on its plate. There are so many good reasons to do this.

Given what we have learned in the time since we first made this recommendation, we intend to continue to collect data regarding this idea. We also have a better grasp of the funding process and know that such an idea cannot be implemented immediately and will require much advocacy on our part and those from the communities in question who support the idea to make it a reality. Our conviction remains strong that this is needed to make headway at resolving a majority of the child protection issues in this region.

We request that OCS provide us with an action plan that includes a time line to make this a reality. We would like that plan to clearly specify what can be accomplished every year until the fifth region is created. The CRP pledges to continue to advocate for this region while collecting data via a survey to determine the exact boundaries of the proposed region.

**Recommendation 3. Supporting and developing the relationship between OCS & ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) workers**

A great deal of effort has been directed toward the problem of disproportionality in Alaska's child welfare system; the problem being that approximately 65% of the children in OCS custody are Alaska Native while only 15% of the population of the state is Alaska Native. There are many causes for this problem and many well-qualified, well-funded people have been and continue to work on this issue.

We have one recommendation that we feel can only help address this issue. An improved relationship between OCS workers and ICWA workers in all communities will improve communications, trust, and outcomes for children. If workers can see each other as resources, teammates, and trust that the other also has the best interest of the child as their motivation the system can only be improved.

We know that many efforts have been made at the highest levels to improve communication, collaboration and trust between OCS and the tribal agencies. However, we are really advocating for relationship building at the ground level. We recommend that OCS find models where these relationships exist, where there are new and different programs and try to replicate those successes. Some innovative programs include the Knowing Who You Are program supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the program being implemented in Quinhok, and the Lakota program - Family Group Decision Making.

One way for OCS to demonstrate its trust in ICWA workers, and free its workers to make home visits and do other necessary tasks, is to allow ICWA workers to license foster homes. In many communities it takes nearly a year to become a licensed foster home, in part because of the infrequency of visits to many communities by OCS licensing workers. Allowing ICWA workers to make those visits would speed the process of becoming licensed. This will encourage more people to open their homes if the licensing process is not so drawn out and onerous.

We encourage OCS to implement any recommendations made by the Casey Foundation related to this issue.

**Recommendation 4. OCS explore any and all means to relieve social workers of some of their paperwork burden**

In too many of the communities we visit we hear social workers complaining that their title is a misnomer since they do not have time to practice social work due to paperwork burdens. Social workers are skilled practitioners and should be spending as much of their time as possible using those skills to provide services to children and families. Any ideas should be explored and encouraged to make this a reality, including a dictation service (being used by at least one office). Having more social services aids (SSA) on staff would enable these lower paid workers to handle some of the paperwork burden, freeing more highly paid social workers to use their valuable skills to help support Alaska's struggling families.

We urge OCS to develop and implement a staffing ratio for social workers-to-SSAs and to work to secure funding to enable this ratio to be implemented. Adequate ratio of SSAs to SW enables OCS to work smarter—using limited resources in a more efficient manner. Another way to improve social workers' productivity is to purchase more laptops for workers to use when traveling. Especially in rural Alaska where weather delays can last days, having a secure laptop is the difference between wasted time and productive time while waiting out a storm.

Enabling social workers to practice social works helps improve worker retention. This is the number one request we have heard from social workers when we are in the field. They need help with filing, making basic calls, and transporting children; all tasks that do not require a social work background to do a good job.

## Commendations

We would like to thank Governor Palin for granting a waiver to OCS during the hiring freeze.

We commend OCS for thinking outside the box to implement the Knowing Who You Are training sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to forge personal and working relationships between regional OCS and ICWA workers. Both groups report a high degree of satisfaction with the new collaborations that have resulted.

We commend OCS Director Tammy Sandoval for supporting the new child advocacy center in the Copper River Basin by finding a way to collocate the Glennallen OCS Field Office with the CAC.

We commend OCS Director Tammy Sandoval for working to improve collaboration with several other state agencies, such as the Division of Juvenile Justice and the Division of Behavioral Health. This is an excellent idea and we hope she will continue in this vein, reaching out to as many other state agencies as possible. In this climate of reduced state funding, collaboration is one way to try and stretch state dollars to serve as many children and families as possible. Certainly, many state agencies can and frequently do have the same clients.

Respectfully submitted by the Citizen Review Panel:



Electronically signed  
June 30, 2009

Fred Van Wallinga, Chair



Electronically signed  
June 30, 2009

Carol J. Olson, Vice Chair



Electronically signed  
June 30, 2009

Pamela M. Dupras, Member



Electronically signed  
June 30, 2009

Dana W. Hallett, Member



Electronically signed  
June 30, 2009

Arthur S. Hansen, Member



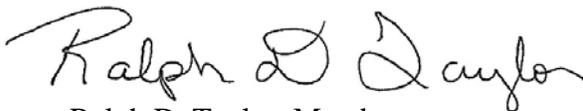
Electronically signed  
June 30, 2009

Susan Heuer, Member



Electronically signed  
June 30, 2009

Kristin Hull, Member



Electronically signed  
June 30, 2009

Ralph D. Taylor, Member

*Never doubt that a small, dedicated group of citizens can make a difference.  
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has...  
~ Margaret Mead*