

Letter to Legislators re: transferring prisoners out of state

October 26, 2019

Dear

Senate President Cathy Giessel and House Speaker Bryce Edgmon:

As a non-partisan, policy-focused non-profit organization, Alaska Common Ground asks the Legislature to find common ground to keep Alaska's prisoners within Alaska and prevent the use of private, for-profit, out-of-state prisons by the Department of Corrections.

This

request is based on Alaska Common Ground's long-standing support for therapeutic justice, i.e. treating underlying causes of criminal behavior such as substance abuse disorders, mental health issues, and lack of positive community support. We held public forums on the subject, listened to a variety of well-qualified experts, and concluded that therapeutic justice is the best way to close the revolving door in and out of prison.

There

are several reasons why out-of-state, private prisons are not effective in reducing recidivism.

Sending Alaskan prisoners to distant, out-of-state facilities cuts them off from

all community and family support. In

addition, private prisons do not have a good record treating the root causes of

criminal behavior. They are profit- motivated and their profit is affected by the number of individuals incarcerated. There is a built-in conflict between operating for profit and reducing the number of people incarcerated or returning to incarceration. In the state's previous experience, prisoners sent to private out-of-state prisons often returned as hardened criminals with connections to criminal gangs.

Ninety-five percent of all prisoners are eventually released. Since most who return to prison do so because of a new crime, it is greatly in the interest of public safety to reduce recidivism.

We support the Legislature's appropriation to reopen the Palmer Correctional Center and house Alaskan prisoners within Alaska. We urge you to require the Department of Corrections to comply with legislative funding directives and reject Department of Corrections' proposal to send prisoners to private, out-of-state prisons.

Sincerely,

Dick
Mylius, Chair

On
behalf of the Alaska Common Ground Board of Directors

Cc: Nancy Dahlstrom,

Commissioner, Alaska Department of Corrections