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STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OP-ED

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The Office of Professional Standards Investigates Allegations of Trooper Misconduct and Provides Accountability

Members of the public are encouraged to make their concerns known

By: Investigator Ben Evans, DPS's Office of Professional Standards

So many questions have circulated across the nation and here in Alaska regarding training standards, policies and procedures that law enforcement agencies have in place. As the lead investigator for allegations of officer misconduct at the Department of Public Safety, I was shocked by the video, showing Mr. George Floyd's treatment at the hands of the four former Minneapolis Police officers, that triggered the civil unrest and concerns. The way Mr. Floyd was treated is absolutely not in line with how Alaska State Troopers and Alaska Wildlife Troopers are trained and expected to conduct themselves. From my years of experience, I can tell you I'm thankful I work for an agency that prioritizes the sanctity of human life, and only resorts to using deadly force when absolutely necessary.

Recent marches and protests at various locations around our state occurred peacefully as concerned citizens demanded fair and equal treatment from law enforcement and that police officers are held accountable if they do wrong. So, I write today to assure you that the DPS demands the same of its staff. The Office of Professional Standards (OPS) is here to make certain that these standards are upheld.

While the OPS was created over a decade ago, the demonstrations make it is clear to me that, by and large, Alaskans do not know the OPS exists or what it does. Its primary mission is to conduct fair and impartial administrative investigations of employee misconduct for policy violations. While we are responsible for all employee administrative investigations, the majority of our investigations are of Alaska State Troopers and Alaska Wildlife Troopers. The OPS is comprised of civilian employees in the Commissioner's Office, not within the trooper chain of command.

Minor investigations of lower-level misconduct are done by front line supervisors. Lower-level misconduct include allegations such as showing up to work late, damaging a department vehicle, or perhaps not being courteous to members of the public. The OPS conducts investigations into allegations of more severe or complex misconduct which could result in termination or serious disciplinary actions

against an employee. Severe allegations include troopers lying, losing evidence, using excessive force, unbecoming conduct, and violating the law, to name a few.

“Accountability” is one of the core values for the DPS. The OPS receives and tracks complaints for all DPS personnel. If you file a complaint with our office, it will be investigated. If you feel the conduct of an employee was inappropriate, I urge you to let us know about it. We won’t be able to tell you everything about how the complaint resolved because just like most of you, State of Alaska employees have a right to privacy regarding some of their personnel record.

You can file a complaint at any post or with any supervisor. Or, visit the OPS website at <https://dps.alaska.gov/Comm/OPS/Home>. There, you can submit a “Notice of Employee Conduct” form, email, or find the number to call the OPS directly.

Over the years I have visited a lot of posts and talked to a lot of DPS employees and the Alaskans they serve. I’ve reviewed thousands of pages of reports and listened to hundreds of hours of trooper’s audio and video recordings. From this I can tell you that almost every single DPS employee is a good person who is committed to serving the people of our great state. The chain of command works hard to ensure there is good order and discipline throughout the ranks. I can also assure you that no one dislikes a bad trooper more than a good trooper.

Our agency is not perfect, and our personnel are not always going to be perfect; however, we will always strive to be better. If we have an employee who has done something wrong, I want to know about it. That’s why I’m here. The only way we, as an agency, can continue to improve and provide the best level of public safety possible is for allegations to be appropriately vetted.

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Investigator Ben Evans holds a Special Commission from the Department of Public Safety. He has served as a DPS Administrative Investigator since 2015 and was promoted to the Office of Professional Standards supervisor in 2018. Prior to joining the DPS, Inv. Evans was an investigator for the Alaska Department of Revenue’s Criminal Investigation Unit where he investigated violations of tax, PFD, and child support laws. Inv. Evans originally came to Alaska in 2004 as a member of the US Army.