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Department of
Public Safety

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

April 10, 2020

DPS Continues to Provide Critical Services Despite COVID-19

Despite decreased commercial air carrier services, Troopers will still get to calls for help across Alaska

By: Major Bernard Chastain, DPS Operations Support Bureau

To most people throughout the United States, traditional law enforcement response usually involves an officer responding to a call for service in a police car. You know- a marked patrol car with the city or state name proudly decal on the side with some fancy logo and uniquely identifiable image. During emergencies, a police car responds with lights and sirens through a busy city street, a state trooper pulls over a drunk driver on the highway or an officer responds in the middle of the night to a domestic violence call. We are all very familiar with this scenario. But how does it happen where there are no roads? If a police car can't drive there, how does the Alaska Department of Public Safety (DPS) get its Troopers to some of the most remote locations on our planet? Well, we use whatever we can. That includes snowmachines, ATVs and in many cases, aircraft. COVID-19 and the related decline of commercial air carrier services does not change that.

The DPS Aircraft Section has long maintained the largest and most diversified aircraft fleet of any state law enforcement agency in the country. Utilizing 43 aircraft and over 40 pilots, the DPS Aircraft Section plays a vital role in providing air support for law enforcement missions across Alaska. Our aircraft are stationed strategically around the state from Coldfoot to Kodiak and from Hoonah to Kotzebue to maximize their efficiency to provide the best support to all department missions. Nearly all of the Aircraft Section's flights occur in rural Alaska, away from traditional police services and where the commercial air carrier closures impact Alaskans the most. Our Aircraft Section will continue to collaborate with partner agencies and the private sector to maintain mission critical services.

Logistical challenges are nothing new to the Alaska State and Wildlife Troopers, who respond to calls for service reactively across the state. We have long handled calls coming to DPS at all hours of the day and night from all corners of our state. We know that figuring out the logistics

to respond to calls for service can be the most challenging part of the whole case. Availability of pilots, suitability and availability of aircraft, weather and many other factors all play into the ability to respond to a call for help. This is why we strategically station our air assets across the state. It allows for Troopers to more efficiently access rural communities. Our aircraft serve as our “patrol car” in most rural areas for when we respond to emergency calls for service, search for lost persons, patrol the states resources and provide safe transportation.

Yes, the COVID-19 pandemic caused some air carrier businesses in the state to cease operations and others to scale back services. This does not change the response need for law enforcement across the state and it does not change our determination or ability to fulfil mission critical services. The department’s aircraft are fully operational, our trooper and civilian pilots are ready and willing to respond, and our Troopers are the most capable law enforcement resource anywhere.

The Alaska Department of Public Safety will make sure we get to calls for help. If not by car, then by aircraft, boat, snowmachine or other means of transportation. Our team of dedicated Troopers, pilots and support staff serve with a selfless sense of public service and your community can count on our response.

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Major Bernard Chastain is a Deputy Director, within the Alaska State Troopers, that oversees the Operations Support Bureau which includes the Aircraft Section. Maj. Chastain has served the people of Alaska for 22 years in various capacities in both Trooper Divisions.

