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Department of
Public Safety

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STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OP-ED

The DPS Takes a Stand Against Police Brutality

By: Commissioner Amanda Price, AST Colonel Bryan Barlow, AWT Colonel Doug Massie and Fire Marshal Rich Boothby

This past week, no matter where you were or what you were doing, we all became aware of the protesting around our nation that was sparked by the death of Mr. George Floyd, an American now known across the globe. A police officer involved is now charged with murder. The actions of the officers on the scene that day have rightfully put all law enforcement, and equitable treatment in the criminal justice system, in the spotlight.

Throughout Alaska, there were peaceful protests, and hundreds of Alaskans added their voices peacefully to the masses denouncing police brutality and racial injustices. The public is not alone in condemning police brutality. Alaska State Troopers condemn police brutality and the actions that led to the end of Mr. Floyd's life. Alaska Wildlife Troopers condemn police brutality and the actions that led to the end of Mr. Floyd's life. Alaska Fire Marshals condemn police brutality and the actions that led to the end of Mr. Floyd's life. The Department of Public Safety stands alongside all American peaceful protestors in solidarity and in search for justice and equality.

Thanks to the work of Elizabeth Peratrovich, an American Civil Rights Activist and an Alaska Native, the first anti-discrimination law in the United States was passed in Alaska in 1945. Alaska had not yet realized Statehood when this occurred. While Alaska led the country in anti-discrimination legislation, Alaskans and Alaskan law enforcement continue to strive toward a balance of racial or cultural footing. Generally, Alaskans and law enforcement enjoy a strong partnership, and that partnership was reflected in the recent peaceful protests held in our great state. However, racial and cultural relationships require law enforcement to take a consistent, diligent, and conscious effort. Racial and cultural inequities will only be improved when we, as a people, focus on kindness and understanding.

The Department of Public Safety does its part by committing to the highest of standards for our employees and proactively working to foster trust with the public we serve. In these times of civic unrest, it is imperative the Alaska law enforcement community stay vigilant, aware of the concern about police tactics, and constantly work to earn trust.

Alaskans, like all Americans, deserve the highest quality of law enforcement services. The DPS, along with many of its law enforcement partner agencies, continuously strives to live up to the public's standards. The DPS sets and maintains an exceedingly high bar for anyone seeking to join its commissioned ranks. When an individual is selected for hire, they go through more than six months of training before they are allowed to work independently. The rigorous training at the academy includes numerous classes and significant scenario-based training in de-escalation techniques and management

of an endless number of varying situations. This training is not only provided in the academy environment; it is also experienced in continuing education classes. In fact, in 2019, the DPS established an Advanced Training Unit in an effort to enhance the training capabilities of the department. On-the-job training and evaluation is designed to provide your Alaska State Troopers, Alaska Wildlife Troopers, Court Services Officers, and Deputy Fire Marshals with the tools to effectively, lawfully, and compassionately manage situations with the goal of keeping everyone involved safe. The training and evaluation provided by the DPS is rigorous and demanding. Candidates who cannot meet the high standards do not complete the program. The DPS is committed to maintaining this high level of professional training and evaluation – Alaskans deserve nothing less.

In our state, we have communities that experience disproportionate levels of violence. Factors such as historical and generational trauma, substance abuse, adverse childhood experiences, and poverty create an environment that requires a diligent focus on maintaining a partnership established in trust.

There is much work to be done today and every day, right here in Alaska. Part of our job is to enhance the trust and the relationship that law enforcement has with all the people it serves.

We commit to ensuring the officers at the DPS will have all the tools and training necessary to serve Alaskans with loyalty, integrity, and courage. We commit to being transparent with internal department actions as it relates to the use of force, and to continue engaging in all community partnerships. Statewide, Troopers are beloved in the communities they serve – they play basketball with kids in villages, they help their neighbors, and when they arrive in a community the faces of community members light up. We commit to continuing to earn that trust.

The many men and women who wear a badge serve you, every day. They risk their lives for you. For your families. They too are concerned about the actions by police officers that led to Mr. Floyd's death. Our prayer is that you feel a sense of community and security, instead of anger and injustice. We are one.

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