



October 14, 2022

The Honorable Mike Dunleavy
Governor of Alaska
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Governor Dunleavy,

The ACLU of Alaska writes to you with grave concerns over the fact that 15 people have died while in Department of Corrections (DOC) custody in 2022, the highest number of deaths in custody since 2015.

While some deaths in custody may be anticipated, they ought to be rare. But the number of deaths, and details we know about them, are alarming and unusual. Nine of these 15 people have died since August 4, and the four most recently deceased people were unsentenced and no older than 48. The youngest person to die, Kitty Douglas, was 20 years old and in custody for less than a week.

These deaths raise important concerns about the Department of Corrections' ability to uphold its legal obligations to provide adequate care to those individuals in its custody. There are similar concerns about the due process rights of those who have died, especially given that 10 of the 15 had not been convicted at the time of their death, possibly including several people who weren't even charged with a crime.

We respectfully request you take urgent action to prevent further loss of life. We request that you immediately call for an independent investigation into these 15 deaths in custody.

We believe such an investigation should, as a baseline:

- Be conducted by a neutral entity to ensure objectivity and avoid any possible conflicts of interest.
- Provide a thorough accounting of all deaths in custody, including causes of death, how each person's health was assessed, conditions and circumstances of their confinement, and availability and delivery of healthcare prior to death.
- Identify how these deaths in custody may have been prevented, through both individual actions and systemic changes.
- Identify whether language barriers or staff misconduct played a part in any of these deaths in custody.
- Identify whether any of the people who died were eligible for, or had applied for, compassionate release or special medical parole.

- Make recommendations for policy or regulatory changes in order to reduce the number of preventable deaths in DOC custody. These recommendations could apply to the executive branch, DOC, facility administrators, or the legislature.
- Publicly release its findings.

It is important for the broader public, and especially the families and loved ones of those who have died, to trust that the government is holding itself accountable and acting with transparency.

We look forward to your prompt action to ensure each of these deaths is fully investigated so that we can prevent further tragedies from occurring.

Sincerely,



Mara Kimmel
Executive Director

Cc: Jen Winkelman, Acting Commissioner, Department of Corrections