



July 27, 2020

City and Borough of Juneau
Permit Center
230 S Franklin Street
Juneau, AK 99801

by email only to: pc_comments@juneau.org

Re: ACLU of Alaska's support for Tlingit & Haida's Alaway Avenue and Allen Court Transitional Housing Program Conditional Use Permits

Dear City and Borough of Juneau:

The American Civil Liberties Union of Alaska strongly supports the conditional use permit application by Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska for the permitting of transitional housing programs for people returning from incarceration.

People released from prison are less likely to reoffend, and are thus less likely to go back to prison, if they have stable, secure, and supportive housing,¹ and cultural support makes reentry housing more supportive. Tlingit & Haida is developing this comprehensive program for both Native and non-Native community members to support this foundation for successful reentry.

Their success will make Juneau safer, decrease victimization, shrink the footprint of our prison system, and offer opportunities for a community that has traditionally had a hard time getting housing. And, in this time of a global pandemic, providing sober housing and supportive services reduces the spread of COVID-19 by keep people who are reentering out of crowded, congregate shelters where social distancing is difficult.²

¹ Council of State Governments Justice Center, *Reducing Recidivism: States Deliver Results Bureau of Justice Assistance*: <https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/Publications/CSG-ReducingRecidivism.pdf>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 guidance for people experiencing homelessness: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/homelessness.html>.

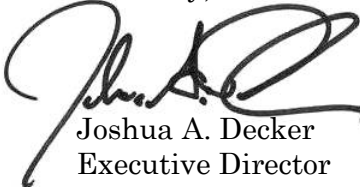
Alaska has long grappled with a persistently high recidivism rate: right now, 2 out of 3 Alaskans who are released from prison will reoffend again.³ This rate will grow as the pandemic rages without an end in sight, and institutional programming that provides education and vocational opportunities, substance misuse treatment, mental health services, and in-reach opportunities from post-incarceration service providers is, in some cases, suspended indefinitely or substantially scaled back.⁴ Service providers and formerly incarcerated people report that it's now harder to obtain basic government identification necessary for gainful employment and housing, and the knowledge to be absorbed by a workforce now heavily reliant on technological skills and tools necessary to work remotely, such as Zoom, Skype, and Microsoft Teams.⁵

Holistic programs, like those of Tlingit & Haida's Alaway Avenue and Allen Court transitional housing programs, not only help fill this growing gap of necessary services for returning citizens to be successful, but also provide alternative housing options outside of the private prison industry, which derive their corporate profits by warehousing and caging people,⁶ and outside of the congregate emergency shelter model that is struggling during the ongoing worldwide health crisis.

Supporting this effort means supporting the Constitutional rights to rehabilitation and equal protection; it means supporting those returning to our communities in the midst of substance misuse recovery, and those with mental health illness; and it means the City and Borough of Juneau supports returning power to its tribal entity, while fighting against the same systemic racism that ripped tribal power away from indigenous people and disproportionality incarcerates Alaska Native people.⁷

Thank you for considering our views, and please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Joshua A. Decker
Executive Director

³ Recidivism data provided by the Alaska Department of Corrections, which also explains that about 900 people release from state jails and prisons monthly: <https://doc.alaska.gov/rehabilitation-reentry/faq>.

⁴ Alaska Department of Corrections, *FAQ-COVID19*, April 2, 2020: <https://doc.alaska.gov/covid-19/docs/DOC%20FAQ.pdf>.

⁵ Issues discussed at the Anchorage Reentry Coalition Meeting: State of Reentry (Part 1).

⁶ Justice Policy Institute, *The Problem with Private Prisons*: <http://justicepolicy.org/news/12006>.

⁷ In Alaska, 39 percent of the prison population is Alaska Native/American Indian. Alaska Department of Corrections, *2019 Offender Profile*: <https://doc.alaska.gov/admin/docs/2019Profile.pdf>.