



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of Public Safety

DIVISION OF ALASKA STATE TROOPERS

Office of the Director

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February 13, 2017

Christopher Tolley
Chief of Police
Anchorage Police Department
4501 Elmore Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

Re: Alaska State Trooper Discontinuation of Services to Turnagain Arm Communities

Dear *Chris* Chief Tolley:

I write to follow-up our recent communications regarding the discontinuation of the Alaska State Troopers ("AST") services to the Turnagain Arm communities, Girdwood, and surrounding areas up to Mile Post 75 of the Seward Highway (hereinafter "Communities"), effective May 1, 2017.

As of that date, AST will no longer be able to provide primary law enforcement services to these Communities as they fall completely within the boundaries of the Municipality of Anchorage ("MOA"). The Anchorage Police Department must be the primary law enforcement agency for these Communities.

Through April 30, 2017, AST will continue to provide limited police services to the Communities and support to the Whittier Police Department assigned to patrol Girdwood. Currently, AST is responding to the Communities and other law enforcement calls for service from our Seward or Soldotna Posts. As long as there is available funding, AST intends to keep three Bureau of Highway Patrol ("BHP") Troopers assigned to the Seward Highway to conduct directed traffic enforcement only. BHP will continue to investigate traffic crashes that occur on the highway from McHugh Creek to Mile Post 75 of the Seward Highway when they are on duty, unless the Anchorage Police Department wishes to investigate all crashes within the MOA. AST will not place BHP on standby, and will not authorize off-duty callouts to investigate crashes within the MOA.

After April 30, 2017, AST will continue its long-standing mutual relationship of cooperation and support with the Anchorage Police Department. AST will continue to support the Anchorage Police Department if they request specialized assistance as AST has always done in the past. This includes investigation support, criminal intelligence support, and SWAT/SERT team

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support. AST will also remain available to provide support in the event of a major accident on the Seward Highway upon request. AST's overall position, however, remains that the Seward Highway to Mile Post 75 is within the Anchorage Police Department's jurisdiction, which includes investigating crashes that occur on the Seward Highway.

As you are aware, AST first began this process in early 2015 and our agencies have engaged in significant communication over the past two years to ensure a smooth transition. AST's original notification of withdrawal was meant to allow the MOA time to find an adequate solution to police an area that is wholly contained within the MOA's boundaries. The original notification date has come and gone, and AST must now move forward with its initial objectives.

The decision to withdraw from this area has been agonizing, as was the decision to eliminate other posts AST was forced to close over the past two years because of the fiscal crisis we face and the necessary budget reductions. AST has had to make difficult decisions and reevaluate its core mission by focusing on the areas of the State that lack adequate police services.

As Governor Walker has repeatedly stated, the \$4 billion deficit we faced two years ago will take a multi-pronged approach to resolve—budget cuts, new revenues, and use of the permanent fund earnings reserve. All of these elements are necessary, but so far, we have only seen the cuts. Even if we can get a sustainable fiscal plan in place, government will necessarily continue to be constrained while the budget and our economy stabilize. This has been a difficult process, and we have worked hard to maintain the highest level of public safety possible under the circumstances, however with a smaller budget and fewer troopers, we must narrow our focus.

During the past two fiscal years, AST has seen a budget reduction of over \$10M. Under the Governor's proposed budget for the current fiscal year, AST will realize another \$1.4M reduction that will include a loss of yet another Trooper position. Since 2015, AST has seen a reduction of 32 Trooper positions. With these reductions, AST is at 1990 staffing levels.

These reductions in Troopers have forced the closure of many Trooper posts around Alaska; removing full time Trooper presence from Talkeetna, McGrath, Ninilchik, Girdwood, and Yakutat. Additionally, the Cooper Landing post has been reduced to one Trooper, and is slated for closure by the end of this fiscal year. If future reductions occur, AST is anticipating closing the Haines Trooper post as well.

AST has also eliminated 19 BHP positions, leaving only three BHP officers patrolling the Seward Highway, and eliminating the BHP in Fairbanks, Soldotna, and the Mat-Su Valley. During the last year BHP was functioning at full capacity, it contacted over 25,000 motorists, issued over 14,000 citations, and made approximately 300 drunk-driving arrests.

In the Mat-Su Valley, AST services over 85,000 residents with only 44 Trooper positions to patrol the area 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This translates to limited shift coverage

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throughout the Valley, meaning there are fewer than eight troopers on duty at any given time to police an area the size of West Virginia.

On the Kenai Peninsula, AST has just two to three Troopers on duty during the hours of 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.

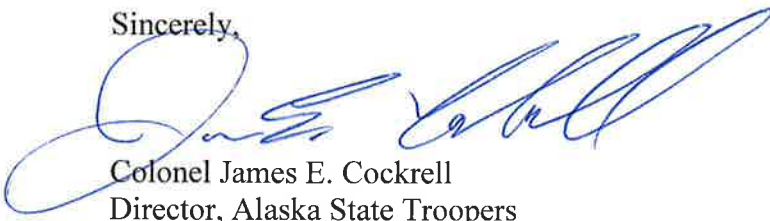
In rural Alaska, AST has been hampered by the reductions to its travel budget and reductions within the aircraft section. This has greatly reduced AST's ability to make routine visits to rural Alaska.

During the 2016 calendar year, more than 20 experienced Troopers resigned. Most of these hired on to other police agencies around the country, including three to the Anchorage Police Department. This figure does not include the Troopers who retired or left for medical reasons.

Alaska's uncertain economic future has impacted AST's ability to recruit new applicants. Trooper application numbers are down, limiting AST's ability to fill vacant positions. Meanwhile, the Anchorage Police Department is running full academies, luring potential applicants with higher wages, offering a stable economic future, and officers are not required to transfer to rural Alaska.

In short, the above-described reductions and the fiscal crisis we continue to face have placed a heavy burden on our front line Troopers. While AST continues to experience reductions in funding and positions, Alaska's law enforcement responsibilities remain the same, all of which brings us to the present issue. Accordingly, effective May 1, 2017, AST will be exercising its discretion to allocate its limited resources away from the MOA, which has the largest professional police force in Alaska. AST will no longer be able to provide regular Trooper services within the above-referenced Communities.

Sincerely,



Colonel James E. Cockrell
Director, Alaska State Troopers

Cc: Walt Monegan, Commissioner
Bill Comer, Deputy Commissioner
Major Andrew Greenstreet, Deputy Director
Major Jeffrey Laughlin, Deputy Director
Captain Maurice Hughes, "E" Detachment Commander
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