

Public Safety Commission Draft Proposal Submitted by Alaska Coalition for Justice

1. Executive Summary

The Alaska Coalition for Justice (ACJ) proposes the creation of an independent, adjudicatory Public Safety Commission (PSC) to bridge critical gaps in the relationship between the community and the Municipality of Anchorage. This commission addresses the fundamental trust deficit that has historically existed between the community and law enforcement by establishing mechanisms for transparency, accountability, and direct community collaboration.

The PSC will operate as an independent, fully-funded municipal commission with direct investigative authority and subpoena power, serving as a transparent oversight body that strengthens community trust while promoting continuous improvement in police practices and standards. The proposal aligns with the eight key principles established by the National Association of Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE) and addresses the systemic failures that led to the termination of the previous Public Safety Advisory Commission in January 2024.

2. Background and Historical Context

- a. The Ineffective Public Safety Advisory Commission** For nearly three decades, the Municipality of Anchorage maintained a Public Safety Advisory Commission (PSAC) that, despite good intentions, ultimately failed to fulfill its promise to the community. The commission's termination in January 2024 marked the end of a structure that was fundamentally limited by its purely advisory nature—a limitation that rendered it ineffective and vulnerable to political interference.

The 2023 Sunset Audit painted a stark picture of the commission's decline. From January 2022 through July 2023, PSAC met only three times, produced no reports or resolutions, and maintained such poor records that auditors could not even verify whether basic attendance requirements were met. Meeting minutes from 2022 and 2023 were either missing entirely or remained unapproved. This administrative breakdown was not merely bureaucratic failure—it was symptomatic of a body with no real authority and no accountability mechanisms to ensure its work mattered.

Understanding Why PSAC Failed: Insights from Those Who Served To better understand the root causes of PSAC's failure, the Alaska Coalition of Justice interviewed a former PSAC member who served for approximately two years. This interview revealed that the commission's problems extended far beyond what appeared in audit reports—they were fundamental flaws inherent in a purely advisory structure without enforcement authority or meaningful accountability mechanisms.

The former member's experience illuminated multiple structural failures:

- **Minimized Documentation:** Administrative staff systematically recorded only minimal information during meeting minutes, failing to capture public testimony, questions, or recommendations. Commission members had to actively advocate for basic items to be documented, yet critical discussions and public input were still omitted from the record.
- **Political Vulnerability:** Changes in mayoral administration led to commission members being removed through administrative loopholes, despite terms that were intended to last three years. The former member was appointed under one mayor and promptly removed after a new mayor took office. This political interference undermined the commission's independence and made it subject to the preferences of whoever held executive office.
- **Ignored Recommendations:** Even unanimous commission votes carried no weight. The commission could make recommendations and vote on proposals, but departments and administration had no obligation to implement or even acknowledge or respond to them. The advisory-only status meant that even consensus recommendations could be completely disregarded.
- **Administrative Neglect:** Basic operational requirements were ignored. Bylaws weren't followed, meetings weren't properly scheduled, technology access was inconsistent, and proposed bylaw amendments were dismissed. The administrative infrastructure was so deficient that it needed to be completely overhauled, yet efforts to improve it were blocked.

The commission consistently operated with incomplete membership—only six members instead of the required nine—and experienced constant turnover in APD representation, which prevented any meaningful continuity or institutional knowledge from developing.

The Cost of Advisory-Only Status An advisory-only structure created a body that could be safely ignored. Important discussions occurred and community members called in with concerns, but these conversations were not adequately recorded and led to no concrete action. When commission members attempted to expand public engagement—including moving public comment earlier in meetings and creating accessible community forums—these efforts existed in a vacuum without institutional support or follow-through.

Most critically, the commission never reviewed any incidents involving excessive use of force by officers and had no capacity to investigate concerns—despite oversight being precisely what community concerns reflected. The lack of investigative authority meant that even when serious issues were raised, the commission had no mechanism to examine them thoroughly or ensure accountability.

Community Trust Eroded The August 2025 community workshop and subsequent October sessions have identified rebuilding trust as a central public safety need. Yet the prior structure of the PSAC actively damaged that trust. Community members who gave their time to serve were devalued. Alaska Native women who brought critical cultural expertise were dismissed. Members of the public who attended meetings and provided testimony saw their concerns minimized or omitted from the record entirely. The commission became a symbol not of accountability, but of the municipality's unwillingness to empower genuine community-led oversight.

Why Advisory Status Failed The purely advisory model failed because it lacked:

1. **Authority:** No ability to require responses, ensure implementation, or hold systems accountable
2. **Protection:** Vulnerability to political interference and removal without cause
3. **Resources:** No investigative capacity or independent staff support
4. **Documentation:** No requirement for departments to meaningfully record or respond to recommendations
5. **Consequences:** No mechanism to address non-compliance or continued dysfunction
6. **Stability:** Terms could be cut short through administrative maneuvering, preventing long-term strategic work

The Path Forward: From Advisory to Empowered This proposal reimagines public safety oversight not as advisory, but as an empowered Public Safety Commission with defined authority, protected independence, adequate resources and staffing, and the capacity to truly bridge system and community needs. Only through structural authority, not good intentions, can we rebuild the trust that purely advisory bodies have eroded.

3. Commission Purpose and Mission

The Public Safety Commission will operate as an independent, fully-funded municipal commission with direct investigative authority and subpoena power. The commission will serve as a transparent, accountable oversight body that strengthens community trust while promoting continuous improvement in police practices and standards.

The most important gap between the community and the Anchorage Police Department has been historically and remains an abiding trust issue. The solution to the trust gap is increased transparency and accountability to and direct collaboration with the community by APD.

The ACJ proposal will create mechanisms for greater transparency and accountability as well as an ongoing forum for improving understanding and trust between the community

and APD. In addition to improved community-police relations, the proposal creates a strong collaborative approach to ongoing improvement in APD policies and practices. Among other benefits, these improvements will enhance the recruitment and retention of high-quality officer candidates.

4. Scope and Authority

a. Role in Gathering Community Input and Sharing Findings The PSC will serve as a critical bridge between the community and municipal government by:

- i. Receiving and reviewing community complaints against law enforcement and initiating independent investigations
- ii. Conducting follow-up investigations to state-level and internal police department investigations to ensure thoroughness and accountability
- iii. Subpoena power to access testimony and evidence for investigative purposes
- iv. Issuing comprehensive Reports of Investigation (ROI) with findings, conclusions, and policy recommendations
- v. Engaging in community support and outreach initiatives to build trust and understanding

b. Role in Receiving Directives from the Municipality The PSC will respond to municipal directives by:

- i. Researching specific areas of concern identified by the assembly or administration
- ii. Developing evidence-based recommendations grounded in best practices and community input
- iii. Advising the administration and assembly on best practices in law enforcement as part of a continuing improvement mandate
- iv. Reviewing and assessing police training curricula, recruitment practices, and departmental policies with authority to provide input and recommendations

c. Role in Providing Transparent Reporting The PSC will ensure accountability through:

- i. Public quarterly reporting on investigations, findings, and recommendations
- ii. Annual comprehensive reports on police standards and community relations
- iii. Developing and issuing policy change recommendations to the police department and municipal assembly, with authority to monitor implementation

d. Areas to be overseen by the Public Safety Commission:

- i. **Safe Public Spaces**

1. Safety and accessibility of parks, trails, downtown areas, and family spaces

ii. Crime Prevention and Law Enforcement

1. Police accountability and transparency
2. Community-police relations and trust-building
3. Balanced approaches to enforcement and community needs

iii. Houselessness and Encampments

1. Visibility and management of encampments
2. Effects on parks, trails, and neighborhoods
3. Pathways to housing and services

iv. Substance Use and Mental Health

1. Expansion of Mental health crisis response services
2. Harm reduction strategies
3. Access to recovery and support services

v. Root Causes and Systemic Prevention

1. Poverty and economic inequality
2. Affordable housing availability
3. Education and workforce development
4. Community support systems and social services
5. Long-term prevention strategies

5. Commission Structure

- a. **Establishment** The PSC is established as an independent adjudicatory body with investigative authority under the legislative branch of the municipality.
- b. **Membership Composition** The PSC will be composed of 9 members confirmed by the Anchorage Assembly and will be eligible to serve limited terms with a minimum of 2 years. The commission will include:
 - i. **9 community members** (eligibility criteria to be determined through a transparent process that ensures diverse representation)
- c. **Commission Support**
 - i. **3 paid professional staff members** with investigative expertise who will provide continuity, technical capacity, and professional investigative skills. In order for the commission to be effective, adequate resources and staff time must be allocated to support the commission.

d. Appointment Process

[To be developed alongside the municipality with community input to ensure a fair, transparent process that protects against political interference while ensuring diverse community representation]

Key considerations for the appointment process should include:

- i. Protection against political removal without cause

- ii. Staggered terms to ensure continuity
- iii. Clear eligibility criteria that prioritize community connection and independence from law enforcement
- iv. Representation from communities most impacted by policing practices
- v. Transparent nomination and confirmation procedures

e. Term Lengths and Limits

- i. Limited terms with a minimum of 2 years
- ii. Staggered terms to ensure institutional continuity and prevent wholesale turnover during political transitions
- iii. Protection against removal without cause to ensure independence from political interference
- iv. Term limits to ensure fresh perspectives while allowing sufficient time for members to develop expertise

6. Roles and Responsibilities

a. Commission Duties The Public Safety Commission will fulfill the following core duties:

i. Investigation Authority

- 1. Receive and review community complaints against law enforcement
- 2. Authority to initiate independent investigations of complaints and incidents
- 3. Conduct follow-up investigations to state-level investigations (e.g., Office of Special Prosecutions)
- 4. Conduct follow-up investigations to internal police department investigations
- 5. Subpoena power to access testimony and evidence from all relevant parties
- 6. Issue comprehensive Reports of Investigation (ROI) with findings, conclusions, and recommendations

ii. Policy Development and Monitoring

- 1. Develop and issue policy change recommendations to police department and assembly
- 2. Monitor implementation of recommended policy changes
- 3. Review and provide input on police policies and procedures

iii. Law Enforcement Best Practices

- 1. Advise the administration and assembly on best practices in law enforcement
- 2. Continuing improvement mandate to identify and promote excellence in policing

- iv. **Training and Recruitment Oversight**
 - 1. Review and assess police training curricula and methods
 - 2. Review recruitment practices and standards
 - 3. Provide input and recommendations on training and recruitment policies
- v. **Transparent Public Reporting**
 - 1. Public quarterly reporting on investigations, findings, and recommendations
 - 2. Annual comprehensive report on police standards and community relations
- vi. **Community Engagement**
 - 1. Community support and outreach initiatives
 - 2. Public forums and listening sessions
 - 3. Accessible complaint processes
 - 4. Building trust through transparency and accountability
- b. **Member Expectations** Commission members are expected to:
 - i. Attend regular meetings and participate actively in commission work
 - ii. Approach investigations and policy work with objectivity and commitment to evidence-based conclusions
 - iii. Engage respectfully with all stakeholders, including community members, law enforcement, and municipal officials
 - iv. Maintain confidentiality when required during ongoing investigations
 - v. Participate in community outreach and public education efforts
 - vi. Complete training on investigation procedures, civil rights law, and police standards
 - vii. Declare conflicts of interest and recuse themselves when appropriate
 - viii. Commit to the full term of service to ensure continuity
- c. **Staff Support** The PSC will be fully funded by the municipality with adequate resources including:
 - i. **3 professional staff positions** (investigators/analysts) with experience in law enforcement oversight, investigation, or related fields
 - ii. **Administrative support** for meeting coordination, record-keeping, and public communications
 - iii. **Budget for training, technology, and operational needs** including:
 - 1. Investigation tools and case management systems
 - 2. Training for commission members and staff
 - 3. Public engagement and communication resources
 - 4. Office space and equipment

7. Operational Guidelines

a. Meeting Frequency and Procedures

- i. Regular monthly meetings open to the public
- ii. Special meetings as needed for urgent matters or investigation reviews
- iii. Executive sessions when necessary to protect confidential investigation information
- iv. Clear agendas published in advance with opportunities for public input
- v. Comprehensive minutes that capture discussions, recommendations, and public testimony

b. Quorum Requirements

- i. A quorum of [to be determined] members required for official business
- ii. Voting procedures that ensure transparency and accountability

c. Public Participation

- i. Public comment period at every meeting
- ii. Accessible complaint submission process (online, phone, in-person)
- iii. Regular community forums in diverse neighborhoods
- iv. Translation and interpretation services to ensure accessibility
- v. Accommodations for individuals with disabilities
- vi. Multiple channels for community input and feedback

d. Document Access and Authority The PSC will have:

- i. Full access to all information, evidence, police records, and personnel
- ii. Subpoena power to access testimony from police officers, staff, and witnesses
- iii. Ample authority to conduct thorough investigations (NACOLE principle)
- iv. Independent operational authority free from police department or mayoral interference

8. Budget and Resources The budget must be sufficient to ensure the commission can fulfill its mandate without dependence on the police department or vulnerability to political budget manipulation. The commission will be fully funded by the municipality with a budget adequate to support:

- a.** 3 full-time professional staff positions with competitive salaries
- b.** Administrative and legal support
- c.** Investigation tools, technology, and case management systems
- d.** Training and professional development
- e.** Community outreach and public education
- f.** Office space, equipment, and operational expenses
- g.** Independent operational authority (NACOLE principle)

9. Implementation Timeline

[To be developed with specific milestones including:]

- a.** Municipal code amendments to establish the commission

- b. Development of detailed bylaws and operating procedures
- c. Appointment process and member selection
- d. Staff recruitment and hiring
- e. Training for commission members and staff
- f. Development of complaint intake and investigation procedures
- g. Launch of public education and outreach campaign
- h. First commission meeting and operational commencement

10. Expected Outcomes and Success Metrics

- a. **Rebuilding Community Trust** The establishment of an independent Public Safety Commission represents a significant step forward in community-police relations. By providing transparent oversight, thorough investigations, and evidence-based policy recommendations, the PSC will strengthen accountability while supporting officers who serve with integrity and professionalism.
- b. **Success Metrics** The commission's effectiveness will be measured through:
 - i. **Community trust indicators:** Survey data on public confidence in police accountability
 - ii. **Investigation metrics:** Number of complaints received, investigated, and resolved
 - iii. **Policy impact:** Number of recommendations made and implemented
 - iv. **Transparency measures:** Timely publication of quarterly and annual reports
 - v. **Community engagement:** Participation rates in community forums and public meetings
 - vi. **Systemic improvement:** Trends in use-of-force incidents, complaints, and community satisfaction
- c. **Long-term Benefits** This enhanced oversight structure will:
 - i. Improve public confidence in law enforcement accountability
 - ii. Support officer morale through fair and credible review processes
 - iii. Create clear pathways for continuous improvement in policing practices
 - iv. Strengthen recruitment and retention of high-quality officers
 - v. Build a stronger, more trusted police department better equipped to serve and protect all members of the Anchorage community

11. Appendices

- a. [NACOLE Principles for Effective Community-Led Oversight](#)
- b. [Resolution No. 2025-111: Establishing a Taskforce to Explore Reimagining the Former Public Safety Advisory Commission](#)
- c. [PSAC Sunset Report - August 11, 2023](#)
- d. [MOA PSAC Historical Overview Document - September 2025](#)