

mat-su Reentry coalition Newsletter

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The 2025 Mat-Su Reentry Summit is Right around the Corner

It is that time of year again, time to join us at our annual Mat-Su Reentry Summit. It is being held on September 4 & 5th at the Curtis D. Menard Memorial Sports Center in Wasilla.

This year's summit will have speakers from all around Alaska that want to share their expertise. Our Keynote Speakers on Day 1 are Dr. Ingrid Johnson, from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and Dr. Rei Shimizu, from the University of Alaska Anchorage. They will be presenting on Restorative Justice, what it is, the evidence-base behind it, and the type of restorative justice programs that exist in Alaska.

On Day 1, we will also have speakers from DOC Reentry, Education and Vocational Services, the Mat-Su Job Center, and the Alaska Veterans Administration Justice Outreach Program who will talk about the programs they are doing inside the correctional institutions. We will end this day with Advocacy 101 and Suicide Prevention Training.

On Day 2, our Keynote Speaker is Claude Ouellette, a person with lived experience and the author of "Understanding is Everything (a practical guide to self-betterment)". Our breakout session on Day 2 include a Knik Tribe Youth Reentry Program Panel, a presentation on findings from the Fairbanks Native Justice Study, a presentation on persons with disabilities in the reentry process, and a presentation about the Partners for Progress Reentry Program.

We will end our two day summit with a Lived Experience Panel where a panel of formally incarcerated individuals will share their success stories.

Our sponsor for this event is the Mat-Su Health Foundation, without their support we would not be able to offer our annual two day Reentry Summit to the community without cost.

If you haven't registered yet, there is still time, to do so please go to [2025 Mat-Su Reentry Summit Registration](#).

This event will equip community partners with new tools, strategies, and insights to assist them in building bridges to success for formally incarcerated individuals. I look forward to seeing everyone at our Mat-Su Reentry Summit this year.

Barbara Mongar,
Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Coordinator



Networking at last year's Mat-Su Reentry Summit

A Big Thank You to Our Sponsor:



State of the States: Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health Priorities in 2025

By: Leslie Griffin, Justice Center, The Council of State Governments, March 3, 2025

Governors emphasized a wide range of criminal justice and behavioral health initiatives in this year's state-of-the-state addresses. From Alaska to Washington, governors across the U.S. highlighted significant progress in reducing crime rates, combating the opioid crisis, and expanding mental health services. They also noted areas for improvement, some of which will be legislative priorities in 2025.

Common themes included substantial reductions in violent and property crimes, increased funding for law enforcement, aggressive measures against drug trafficking, expanded behavioral health services, and a growing emphasis on youth crime prevention and school safety. Each of these themes is explored in more detail below.

Public Safety and Crime Reduction

States are increasing efforts to reduce crime and enhance public safety, building on approaches that have already yielded positive results. Governors highlighted significant declines in property crime, violent crime, and even homicides, demonstrating a commitment to public safety for all residents.

- Alaska has seen a 37 percent decrease in its overall crime rate since 2018, with significant reductions in property crime (42 percent), violent crime (17 percent), and felony sexual assault (27 percent).
- Colorado also saw drops in various crime categories, including a 15 percent decrease in property crimes and a 9 percent decline in homicides.
- Idaho has experienced a 17 percent reduction in crime since the governor took office, with violent crime at a 5-year low.
- Virginia reduced murders in 13 of its most violent cities by 38 percent in 2024.

=> For more information on crime data in your state, check out our [Tools for States to Address Crime](#).

Law Enforcement Support

Recognizing that well-supported law enforcement is crucial for maintaining and improving public safety, many states are prioritizing investments in their police forces, correctional officers, and other frontline personnel. This commitment extends beyond simply increasing officer numbers, with states focusing on offering competitive salaries, comprehensive benefits, and enhanced training programs designed to attract and retain staff.

- Colorado passed Proposition 130, providing \$350 million for law enforcement hiring, retention, and training.
- Montana is investing \$6.5 million in pay increases, training, and resources for correctional officers.

Drug Trafficking and Fentanyl Crisis

Although [overdose deaths are starting to decline](#), the fight against drug trafficking, particularly the deadly influx of fentanyl, remains a top priority. States are intensifying their efforts to combat this crisis on multiple fronts, from stopping the flow of illicit drugs across their borders to cracking down on drug dealing within their communities.

- Alaska reports a significant increase in drug seizures, from 78 pounds in 2018 to 572 pounds in 2024.
- Kentucky reports the seizure of \$26 million worth of illicit drugs and nearly 3,000 drug-related arrests by the state police in 2024.

Behavioral Health Services

Many states are focusing on improving mental health and substance use disorder services as a component of maintaining public safety and are expanding their efforts in this area. From increasing access to crisis care and treatment options to addressing the unique needs of young people, states are working to create more comprehensive and accessible behavioral health systems as part of their overall crime reduction strategies.

- Kentucky has certified 21 Recovery Ready Communities and expanded the 988 mental health lifeline.
- Maine approved \$4 million to expand medication-assisted treatment in county jails and allocated \$1.5 million to continue mobile crisis response teams.
- Massachusetts opened 31 community behavioral health centers providing 24-hour crisis care and is also funding behavioral health support in schools across the state. (**Continue on Page 3**)

State of the States: Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health Priorities in 2025 (Continued from Page 2)

Criminal Justice Reform and Rehabilitation

Understanding that successful rehabilitation reduces recidivism and ultimately enhances public safety, several states are implementing policy changes designed to equip incarcerated individuals with the tools they need to reintegrate into society.

- Arkansas plans to expand evidence-based programming in prisons.
- Kentucky aims to decrease recidivism by teaching trades in prisons.
- New Jersey is looking to pass legislation that will reform penalties for technical parole violations.

Youth Crime and School Safety

Addressing youth crime and enhancing school safety continue to be priorities throughout the country. As a result, several states have increased the use of school resource officers (SROs) in an attempt to prevent violence among young people.

- Colorado proposed additional support to prevent youth crime and expand resources for youth who commit crimes.
- Georgia has allocated \$294 million for campus safety, with an additional \$159 million proposed.
- Pennsylvania plans to expand its afterschool programs so that youth have fewer opportunities to engage in violent crime.
- South Carolina has increased the number of schools that have resource officers from 406 schools in 2018 to 1,106 in 2024.

Addressing complex criminal justice and behavioral health challenges requires nuanced and multifaceted approaches. While states have made significant strides in reducing crime and expanding access to services, there is still much work to be done. By continuing to learn from data and prioritizing evidence-based solutions, states can make lasting progress toward creating safer and stronger communities.

Go Here for the Full Article: <https://csgjusticecenter.org/2025/03/03/state-of-the-states-criminal-justice-and-behavioral-health-priorities-in-2025/>

Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su August is National Wellness Month

- **Mat-Su Health Foundation:** The Mission of the Mat-Su Health Foundation is to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans living in the Mat-Su. They offer financial and strategic support to non-profit organizations that offer services and practical solutions to significant health-related problems impacting the citizens of the Mat-Su Borough.
Address: 777 N Crusey St. Suite A201, Wasilla, AK 99654
Website: [Home - Mat-Su Health Foundation](#)
- **Southcentral Foundation:** They offer a wide range of health and wellness services for Alaska Native and American Indian people living in Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and nearby villages.
Clinics in the Mat-Su: [Benteh Nuutah Valley Native Primary Care Center](#) in Wasilla; [C'eyiits' Hwnax Life House Community Health Center](#) in Sutton; and [Eklutna Community Clinic](#) in Chugiak
Phone Numbers: Wasilla, [907-631-7800](#) ; Sutton, [907-631-7665](#) ; and Chugiak [907-631-6120](#)
Website: [SCF Home - Southcentral Foundation](#)

Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **2025 Mat-Su Reentry Summit**

Sep 4 - 5, 2025

In-person at the Menard Center in Wasilla, Alaska (See attached Flyer)

To Register: [2025 Mat-Su Reentry Summit Registration](#)

- **Mat-Su Reentry Services Forum**

Wed, Sept 17, 2025

9:00 to 10:00 AM

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition and Reentry Case Management Program invites you to join us in a virtual Reentry Services Forum. Service providers, PO's, Case Managers, and anyone interested

- **Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Steering Team Meeting**

Tuesday, Oct 7, 2025

9:00 to 10:30 AM

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition has a virtual Steering Team Meeting on the first Tuesday of each month. All Welcome to attend.

For questions, to sign up, or for zoom links to the above events please contact Barbara Mongar at: barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org

Knik Tribe Events:

- **Knik Tribe Family Culture Nights** — Bi-Weekly, Wednesday, 5:30 - 7:30 PM; Location: 758 Shoreline Dr. Wasilla, AK; Open to All
Compact@KnikTribe.org
907-373-7991
- **Talking Circle**—Tuesday, at 6:30 and Wednesday at 5:30; Same location above;
Contact Ralph Lewis at 907-841-9773
- **Youth Wellbriety Circle** — Fridays, from 1 to 3PM; Location: MyHouse, Wasilla

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition is a collaboration of individuals, community stakeholders, public and not-for-profit agencies, faith-based and business partners who are united and committed to reducing recidivism among returning citizens to the Mat-Su community.

Our Mission

To promote public safety by identifying and implementing strategies that increase former prisoners' wellbeing within the community and reduce the likelihood of their return to prison through recidivating.

We will accomplish this by:

- Improved communication and collaboration between Alaska Department of Corrections (DOC) and the community.
- Building community partnerships to strengthen local services.
- Identifying barriers for those being released from incarceration and taking an active role in addressing those concerns.
- Promoting community educational and training opportunities for those releasing regarding resources.
- Work in conjunction with Alaska DOC to inform and promote reentry efforts in Alaska.

By: **Michele Bentz**, Mat-Su Job Center Manager

Happy August! We recently had some movement at the Mat-Su Job Center. Amanda Carlson is the South-Central Regional Manager for Midtown and Mat-Su Job Centers, and Michele Bentz is the new Mat-Su Job Center Manager. She can be reached at (907) 352-2526 or michele.bentz@alaska.gov. Moving forward, Michele will be highlighting the MSJC newsletters. Dedicated reentry staff for MSJC is Norm Lingley. He will provide in-reach services at Goose Creek, Point Mackenzie, and Palmer Correctional. Norm can be reached at (907) 325-2525 or norman.lingley@alaska.gov. This year in the Mat-Su, our office has provided reentry services to over 107 inmates.

The Mat-Su Job Center is open Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Our staff is available to assist one-on-one with employment or training needs. Our center offers two conference rooms, available to partners and community members at no cost, that can accommodate recruitment sessions, staff training, testing, or meetings. One of the conference rooms has a computer lab of 15 computers available. If you are interested in learning more or scheduling a visit to view the space, please call our main line.

We currently offer the following workshops at our job center during regular business hours: Effective Resumes, Employment after Incarceration, Interviewing Strategies, Workplace Alaska (how to apply for State of Alaska Jobs), and Career Support & Training Orientation for grant funding. We also proctor WorkKeys and provide certified typing and 10-key testing, all at no cost. You can reach us at (907) 352-2500 or in person at 877 West Commercial Drive, in Wasilla.

Free fidelity bonds help employers hire skilled workers. Fidelity bonding is an effective job placement tool that helps concerned employers and at-risk job seekers. It is proven to combat recidivism. The Alaska Fidelity Bonding Program offers no-cost, no-deductible bonds to employers who hire at-risk employees, including individuals recovering from substance abuse, those with poor work or credit histories, and other workers who are not otherwise bondable. It is the only program that bonds ex-offenders. Bonds protect employers against job-related theft, forgery, larceny, or embezzlement by an employee, whether on or off the work site. Obtaining a free fidelity bond allows the employer to focus on a worker's skills and productivity while mitigating the risk of worker dishonesty. For more information about Alaska's Fidelity Bonding Program, visit <https://labor.alaska.gov/bonding/> and contact your nearest Alaska job center at <https://jobs.alaska.gov/offices> to obtain bonds.

If you would like to stay informed about current job openings, recruitments, or employment and training-related events in the local Mat-Su area, please contact Faith Woolsey, our Business Connection staff, and request to be added to the Mat-Su mailing list. Faith can be reached at (907) 352-2515 or send a quick email to Faith.Woolsey@alaska.gov.

For the latest information on recruitments, job fairs, virtual job readiness workshops, and training opportunities, visit Alaska's Job Center Network at jobs.alaska.gov and explore the main menu options.



August Trends: Alaska ranks 50th for milk production today, but the dairy industry has a storied history in the state and remains a niche industry with some notable recent developments.

Note: For more information on the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition contact Barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org or go to our Webpage at [Mat-Su Valley Reentry Program | Valley Charities Inc](https://mat-su-valley-reentry-program.valleycharities.org)