



January 2026
Volume 6, Issue 1

Inside this issue

Palmer DA Recognized for Creating Pretrial Diversion Program.....	2-3
Monthly Resource Highlights..	3
Reentry & Knik Tribe Events....	3
Mat-Su Job Center Update.....	4

Newsletter

Mental Wellness Month

January is recognized as Mental Wellness Month, making it an ideal time to prioritize mental health. By establishing healthy habits, adopting effective coping strategies, and engaging in regular self-care practices, individuals can significantly improve their overall well-being.

According to an article from *Psychology Today*, “Stress management strategies—such as regular physical activity, mindfulness, social connection, adequate sleep, and professional support—can help reduce the physiological burden of stress. By recognizing stress as a whole-body experience, we can take proactive steps to protect both our physical and mental health. This year, make a New Year’s resolution to improve your mental well-being, and you’ll be amazed at how much your physical health will benefit.” ([Take Care of Your Brain to Take Care of Your Body | Psychology Today](#)).



Mental Wellness Month also serves as an important reminder of the value of open and honest conversations about mental health. By fostering understanding and creating supportive environments, we can help build a more compassionate society—one that recognizes mental health as a vital component of overall wellness.

Many of the individuals we serve in reentry programs face significant mental health challenges. According to Megan Edge, Prison Project Director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Alaska, “About 60% of the prison population has a mental health issue, about 80% has a diagnosed substance use disorder, and about 55% of the prison population has a dual diagnosis, meaning they experience both a mental health issue and a substance use disorder.” ([DOC under-resourced as a mental and behavioral health provider - The Alaska Current](#))

These statistics highlight the critical need to destigmatize mental health conditions and ensure that accessible, effective resources are available for individuals who are struggling. Supporting mental wellness—especially for vulnerable populations—not only improves individual outcomes but also strengthens communities as a whole.

Barbara Mongar
Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Coordinator

Palmer DA recognized for creating Pretrial Diversion Program

By: Katie Stavick / Frontiersman.com, November 29, 2025

During the November 18 meeting of the Mat-Su Borough Assembly, Assembly member Dimitri Fonov, along with MSB Planning Deputy Director Jason Ortiz, took time to recognize Alaska Department of Law, the Palmer District Attorney's Office, and District Attorney (DA) Trina Sears for their collaborative work with the Pretrial Diversion Program.

The diversion program was established to help address low-level offenders through alternative and supportive approaches to restitution and reduce reliance on traditional prosecution and incarceration. Under the program guidelines, the DA's Office refers defendants with low-level misdemeanors to the Mat-Su Borough to complete community work service in exchange for dismissals or reductions in charges or sentences. The pretrial diversion program puts the referrals to work to help clean up the derelict properties around the Borough. DA Sears wrote the Memorandum of Understanding to initiate the program.



Left to Right, Mat-Su Assembly Member Dimitri Fonov, Palmer DA Trina Sears, Mat-Su Planning Deputy Director Jason Ortiz. Photo by Brad Carper/MSB

Ortiz told the assembly that programs like this are actually quite common in the lower 48, offering people with low-level misdemeanor offenses the opportunity to work with the Borough doing physical labor—typically helping remove blight and trash from land throughout the Borough—rather than pay fines or get incarcerated.

“In the short time that we’ve had this program, it’s been very successful. We’ve had 20 participants, with 14 successfully completing the program. About 400 hours of community service. 32 tons of junk has been removed from the Borough,” he reported.

He said that every Tuesday, the Diversion Program coordinator attends court, and when people are referred to the program, making the initial contact to get them started to join the program.

Ortiz said that unlike other community service programs, which gives offenders six or twelve months to complete their service hours, and often extensions are requested, Borough officials are there in the courtroom, showing they are fully invested in assisting people to complete their service.

“We’re actually working with those people. We’re seeing them complete their hours fast. What that means to taxpayers is that we’re saving money. We’re plucking them out of the court system right there and there’s no longer any costs.” He is referring to the costs for the DA, court costs, probation costs, or other related costs. The diversion program has resulted in cost savings to the State by reducing reliance on traditional prosecution and incarceration while promoting more effective use of public resources.

DA Sears said that the participants are low-level offenders without victims, and the program offers them an opportunity to resolve their cases quickly and give back to the community.

“We are trying every week to send as many offenders as we can to the Borough because we recognize the value in cleaning up the Borough. And the value that they can give back.” She said that her office intends to continue increasing participation in the program.

Palmer DA recognized for creating Pretrial Diversion Program

(Continued from page 2)

Fonov told the assembly that he recently met with members from Frontline Mission, who reported that they had some people coming through the program that were able to serve in the food bank, and that he is looking at other organizations to form partnerships for the diversion program. Ortiz added that he met with the Salvation Army and senior center and is looking forward to working with them in the future.

According to the Alaska Department of Law, there has been a notable increase in participants recommended to the program, logging more than 228 hours of participant time, “reflecting strong community involvement and commitment to restorative justice, according to the Mat-Su Borough resolution.”

“This is really important and we’re doing good things,” said Ortiz. “We’re saving the state money, we’re getting the Valley cleaned up, and we’d like to see it continue and thrive.”

Link to full article:

[Palmer DA recognized for creating Pretrial Diversion Program | Local News | frontiersman.com](#)

Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su

January is National Mental Wellness Month

- **Mat-Su Health Services, Inc.- Behavioral Health Care:** They provide a range of behavioral health resources and treatments for people of all ages and demographics. They offer counseling for children, teens and adults, as well as individual and group therapy.
Address: 1363 W. Spruce Ave, Wasilla, AK;
Clinic Hours: Mon—Fri: 7:00 Am to 5:00PM
Phone: 907-376-2411 (Call this number for eligibility screening and/or crisis intervention)
Email: info@matsuhealthservices.org
Website: [Behavioral Health](#) | [Mat-Su Health Services, Inc.](#) | [Alaska Health Care](#)
- **Mat-Su Regional Medical Center’s Inpatient Behavioral Health Services:** They offer inpatient psychiatric hospitalization with a range of treatment options to help provide for the needs of our community.
Website: [Inpatient Behavioral Health Services](#) | [Mat-Su Regional Medical Center](#) | [Wasilla, AK](#) ;
Phone: 907-861-6168 (This line is monitored 24 hours/day, 7 days/week)
- **United Way 211:** If you need assistance locating long-term mental health resources, talking through a problem, or exploring mental health treatment options, **call 211 to speak with a person who can help.**
Website: [Mental Health](#) | [United Way 211](#)

Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Steering Team Meeting**
Tuesday, February 10, 2026
9:00 to 10:00 AM

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

- **Mat-Su Reentry Forum**
Wed, January 21, 2026
9:00 to 10:00 AM

The Mat-Su Reentry Forum is every third Wednesday of the month. Services Providers, Field PO’s, Case Managers, and any others in attending are welcome.

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,
907-841-9773
- **Youth Wellbriety Circle**
Fridays, from 1 to 3PM;
Location: MyHouse, Wasilla

Mat-Su Reentry Coalition

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.



Mat-Su Job Center Update

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

Happy New Year from all of us here at the Mat-Su Job Center!

We are excited for our upcoming Mat-Su Employer Expo. This annual event is being held at the Menard Center on Wednesday, March 25th, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. This is a fantastic community event for the public to meet and network with employers, community partners, and vocational program professionals. The attached flyer promotes space at the event, as we still have vendor tables to fill. This is a free event and one of the largest job fairs in the state. Don't miss out, get your registration completed soon, as we always have many vendors on our waitlist to attend this event. Soon, we will have the public flyer available, and we would like to ask for your help in getting the word out to the community.

The Department of Labor & Workforce Development has 14 job centers statewide to connect job seekers and employers; our centers are open Monday-Friday, 8 am-5 pm. The most up-to-date contact information for each job center is available at <https://jobs.alaska.gov/offices/>. The Mat-Su job center is located at 877 W. Commercial Drive in Wasilla, and our main line is (907) 352-2500. Our center has two conference rooms available for partners or community members at no cost that can accommodate recruitment, 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 time to see the space, call our main line.

For the most up-to-date information on recruitments, job fairs, virtual job readiness workshops, and job training opportunities, please visit Alaska's Job Center Network at <http://www.jobs.alaska.gov/> and choose from options on the right main menu.



January Trends: Our 2026 forecast for the state, Anchorage, Mat-Su, Fairbanks, and Southeast

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](#)