mat-su Reentry Coalition

Newsletter

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Registration is open for our 2026 Mat-Su Reentry Summit: Building Bridges to Success

The **2026 Mat-Su Reentry Summit** will be held on **September 15–16**. This free, two-day, in-person event is open to everyone and is designed for professionals who work with individuals returning to the community after incarceration, as well as anyone interested in learning more about reentry services. This year's summit will feature an outstanding lineup of national and statewide speakers who will share practical knowledge, innovative approaches, and inspiring perspectives on reentry.

Day 1 sessions include:

- Disability access from prison education through reentry
- Reentry Coalitions discussion session
- Advocacy training: Tips for telling your story and making your "ask"
- Restorative justice healing circles: A culture of care approach to reentry work
- Lived experience panel: *Roads to Success*

Day 2 sessions include:

- National Peer Reentry Professional Certification
- Reentry case management that works: Relationship-centered strategies proven to reduce recidivism
- Employment after incarceration
- Opioid overdose recognition and Narcan utilization training
- Education and training opportunities within the Department of Corrections
- Harm reduction workshop

The goal of our Reentry Summit is to foster meaningful conversations, share evidence-based practices, and strengthen partnerships that support successful reentry. Participants leave with practical tools, new connections, and ideas they can apply to improve their work, programs, and communities.

We extend our sincere thanks to the **Mat-Su Health Foundation** for their generous sponsorship. Their support makes it possible to bring high-quality speakers and training opportunities to our community at no cost to attendees.

Mat-Su HEALTH FOUNDATION

Here's what participants had to say about last year's summit:

- *"It was a wonderful experience. I learned a lot, and it was fun networking with old friends while making new connections."*
- *"I thought it was the perfect-sized summit that allowed for great discussion and networking."*
- *"I enjoyed all of the speakers. Each one provided valuable information."*
- *"This was my first summit—I'm already looking forward to next year!"*

To learn more about the **2026 Mat-Su Reentry Summit** please visit the event website below:
2026 Mat-Su Reentry Summit: Building Bridges to Success Event Website

To **register** go to: **2026 Mat-Su Reentry Summit: Building Bridges to Success Registration**

Barbara Mongar, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Coordinator

Note: For more information on the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition see page 4

Wrongly convicted Alaskan's can now apply for withheld PFDs under new law

By Corinne Smith, 2KTUU AK News Source, Published: Jul. 7, 2026 at 8:36 AM AKDT

Alaskans who have been wrongfully convicted can now apply to claim Alaska Permanent Fund dividends that were withheld while they were incarcerated, under a new law, Corinne Smith with the Alaska Beacon reports.

The Alaska Legislature passed Senate Bill 167 by a combined vote of 58 to 2, and Gov. Mike Dunleavy allowed the bill to pass into law without his signature last month.

Under current Alaska law, those who are incarcerated or sentenced as a result of a felony or certain combination of misdemeanor convictions are ineligible for the Permanent Fund dividend. The amount equivalent to those dividends is deposited into a restorative justice fund each year.

Under the new law, past dividends will be granted to people whose convictions were vacated or reversed, or those who had charges against them dismissed. People who were found not guilty after their case was retried are also eligible. Individuals whose charges were dropped as part of a plea agreement in another criminal case would not be eligible.

Exonerees have two years after a dismissal or not guilty finding — or two years after the bill's effective date — to apply for the past dividends through the Permanent Fund dividend office with the Alaska Department of Revenue. The bill is set to take effect on September 16.

Sen. Scott Kawasaki, D-Fairbanks, sponsored the bill and told lawmakers at a May hearing that the state has a responsibility to those the justice system has failed.

"When an Alaskan has been wrongfully convicted, and then later has had their judgment vacated or reversed, then the state must go beyond merely unlocking the cell," he said. "We have a duty to make amends for those who have endured an injustice under our laws."

Prior to the law's passage, Alaska was one of 12 states that did not provide compensation for wrongful convictions, according to a sponsor statement prepared by Kawasaki's office. Many states provide financial compensation, or college tuition or job training assistance for exonerees.

Kawasaki said it's a small step to restore dividend payments. "These funds represent a loss of personal property during that period of time," he said. "(The bill) is about restoration and not compensation, because really the amount of time that a person has been behind bars can just never be repaid."
The bill was supported by the Tanana Chiefs Conference and non-profit advocacy groups, including the Alaska Innocence Project and After Innocence, a national advocacy non-profit that provides post-release assistance for those wrongfully convicted.

Jon Eldan, the executive director of After Innocence, said in an interview Monday that the restored PFD money is helpful. "Because people who have been incarcerated for crimes they didn't commit typically face a wide range of barriers to rebuilding their lives after that horrible experience, and money helps," he said. "And so not only is it good because it's something that is due to them, but also because every dollar matters when you are trying to come back from having your liberty taken away."

The number of Alaskans who have been wrongfully convicted, or who may be innocent and are in the process of fighting their prior conviction to be overturned is unknown.

The National Registry of Exonerations is a national database of false convictions compiled by Michigan State College of Law, University of Michigan Law and University of California Irvine Newkirk Center for Science and Society. The registry lists over 4,300 wrongful convictions since 1989 nationwide, including nine known cases in Alaska. Those nine cases represent a total of 76 years of incarceration. **(Continued on page 3)**

Wrongly convicted Alaskan's can now apply for withheld PFDs under new law (Continued from page 2)

"How many more people in Alaska who are incarcerated are factually innocent? And the difficult part is we don't know," Eldan said. "Except when these cases resolve in a systemic finding that their conviction needs to be overturned, and have the charges dismissed, etc. and so we don't know what we don't know."

The most infamous cases of wrongful conviction in Alaska are known as the Fairbanks Four — when Marvin Roberts, Eugene Vent, George Frese and Kevin Pease were wrongfully convicted for the killing of a teenager, John Hartman, in 1997. The four Alaska Native men served 18 years in prison each, and were exonerated in 2015 when another man confessed to the killing.

Researchers with the National Registry of Exonerations point to a variety of factors that contribute to wrongful convictions, including police and prosecutorial misconduct, like concealing evidence and witness tampering, false or misleading forensic science, eyewitness testimony or confessions, or inadequate legal defense.

Black and Indigenous people are disproportionately arrested and incarcerated nationwide. Researchers with the National Registry of Exonerations estimate Black Americans are seven times more likely than white Americans to be falsely convicted of crimes.
In Alaska, while Alaska Native people make up less than 20% of the state's population, they made up 40% of the prison population last year.

"We see an over-representation in our prisons of people of color and minority groups," Eldan said. "So I wouldn't be surprised at all — although the numbers are quite small in Alaska, so far, in terms of identified wrongful conviction or innocence cases — to find an over-representation of minority groups, including Alaska Natives."

Click on below link for full article:
https://www.alaskasnewssource.com/2026/07/07/wrongfully-convicted-alaskans-can-now-apply-withheld-pfds-under-new-law/

Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su

- **Mat-Su Health Foundation:** Building a Healthier Future in the Mat-Su
  Website: Mat-Su Health Foundation – Improving the health and wellness of Alaskans living in Mat-Su
  Phone: 907-352-2863

- **LINKS Resource Center:** They provide resources, advocacy and connections to improve lives
  Website: LINKS Resource Center – LINKS Resource Center
  Phone: 907-373-3632

Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Steering Team Meeting**
  Tuesday, Sept 1, 2026
  9:00 to 10:00 AM

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition invites you to attend their Monthly Steering Team Meeting via Zoom

- **2026 Mat-Su Reentry Summit**
  Tuesday, Sept 15, 2026 and Wednesday, Sept 16, 2026
  9:00 AM to 3:30 PM

Our annual 2-day Reentry Summit is geared toward individuals who work with reentrants or those that would like to learn more about reentry services. This year's summit will feature compelling national and statewide speakers

Website: 2026 Mat-Su Reentry Summit: Building Bridges to Success Event Website

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, Wednesdays, 5:30 - 7:30 PM;
  Location: 758 Shoreline Dr. Wasilla, AK; (Open to All)
  Compact@KnikTribe.org
  907-373-7991

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

Chickaloon Village Traditional Council Events:

- **Wellbriety Talking Circle**
  Wednesdays, 1 to 3PM;
  Location: Sutton Library
  More Info: 907-761-3912

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

Mat-Su Job Center is located at 877 W. Commercial Drive, in Wasilla, Alaska, and we are open Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.– 5 p.m. Stop by or call (907) 352-2500 or email: matsu.jobcenter@alaska.gov

Our staff are available to assist one-on-one with employment 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.

Join us for our Job X meetings. This is a partnership/collaboration between agencies and employers to assist individuals in finding suitable employment. This meeting is held twice monthly and highlights a local employer/business or partner who would like to express their business needs, market themselves, network with others in our community, and meet with professionals who provide employment services. Building relationships between agencies, community business partners, and employers is beneficial for everyone! If you would like to be a presenter at Job X or would like to participate to learn more about local resources and agencies, contact Business Connection staff, Faith Woolsey, at (907) 352-2523 or email and request an invitation to faith.woolsey@alaska.gov

The Department of Labor & Workforce Development Newsroom provides monthly updates regarding unemployment rates, wages and salaries, and regional employment changes. To stay up to date on employment and economic development trends, visit https://labor.alaska.gov/news/home.htm and click subscribe.

Keep up with current recruitments, job fairs, virtual job readiness workshops, and training opportunities by visiting Alaska's Job Center Network: http://www.jobs.alaska.gov/ Select from the menu options on the right to get started.



August *Trends*: Alaska was the third most-affected state by last year's sweeping federal job cuts, which picked up speed at the end of the year. **Also in this issue**: The Denali Borough's eclectic economy

Note: For more information on the Reentry Coalition contact **Barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org** or go to our Webpage at **Mat-Su Valley Reentry Program | Valley Charities Inc**.