

# Alaska State Commission for Human Rights

## *Celebrating 60 Years of Civil Rights*

2023 Annual Report  
Volume 2



**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

907-274-4692 | 800-478-4692 | [humanrights.alaska.gov](http://humanrights.alaska.gov)



# HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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# Assessment of Progress Made Toward Equal Employment Opportunity by Every Department of State Government

The Alaska State Commission for Human Rights (“ASCHR” or the “Commission”) is required to assess the progress every department in the executive branch makes toward equal employment opportunity every three years per AS 18.80.060(6). Continuing what ASCHR started three years ago, this assessment is bifurcated from the annual report into a second volume.

As in previous years, ASCHR’s staff analyzed data provided by the Equal Employment Opportunity program in the Department of Administration’s Division of Personnel and Labor Relations. This assessment covers 2021, 2022, and 2023, although staff did review the 2020 data to analyze the differentials going into 2021. One important note is the split during the assessment period from the Department of Health and Social Services into the Department of Health and the Department of Family and Community Services—because the two new departments only existed for one year at the time of the assessment, staff considered the data from the former Health and Social Services in conjunction with the two new agencies.

Our interest in data breakdowns for pay disparities for minorities and females was somewhat thwarted with how the data is collected, although we are pleased to present a few new charts in this year’s assessment showing the number of employees over the age of 40. Age is only protected under federal law for employment matters if the employee is over 40 which is why this is the data point, although state law protects employees under 40 from age discrimination as well.

The total number of State employees fell by 197 employees from 2020 to 2022 but ticked back up into 2023 with a net loss of only 8 employees during the assessment timeline. Overall minority employment saw steady gains, going from 24.3% in 2020 up to 26.6% in 2023, representing an increase

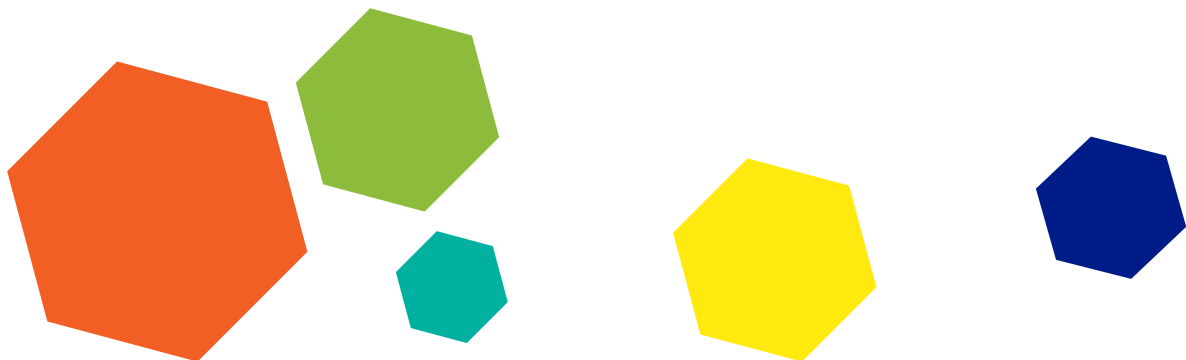
of nearly 200 employees. The number of female employees went down by 50 from 2020 to 2023; a small amount representing a net change of 0.4%. Female employment overall remains strong for the executive branch as a whole with 48.8% of the workforce being women. The Department of Health and the Department of Education and Early Development lead the other agencies with 74.0% and 70.3%, respectively, of their workforces consisting of women.

For comparative baseline data, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics<sup>1</sup> provides a greater breakdown of the 2019 civilian non-institutional population, reporting 344,000 Alaskans within the civilian labor force (including both employed and unemployed individuals). Women represent 46.2% of this group with 159,000 female Alaskans working and/or seeking work, while non-white Alaskans working and/or seeking work number 119,000, representing 34.6% of the available Alaskan civilian labor workforce. Asian people in this category are 7.0% (24,000 people), while Hispanic or Latino individuals are 5.8% (20,000 people). The Bureau of Labor Statistics does not provide further racial breakdowns in the 2019 annual averages table as reported for Alaska. The overall minority and female percentage of the Alaska population as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau for 2019<sup>2</sup> was 39.8% and 47.9%, respectively.

The staff met with leadership from nearly every department to gain a better understanding of the challenges they face in recruiting and retaining both women and people of color in the workforce.

1 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment, 2023, Table 14 (July 19, 2024), available at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/geographic-profile/> (last accessed September 13, 2024).

2 U.S. Census Bureau, QuickFacts Alaska (July 1, 2023), available at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/AK/LFE041222> (last accessed September 13, 2024).



MINORITIES EMPLOYED IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF ALASKA STATE GOVERNMENT AS OF JUNE 30 PERMANENT FULL-TIME

Department Name	2020			2021			2022		
	Total Employees	Minorities	Percentage	Total Employees	Minorities	Percentage	Total Employees	Minorities	Percentage
Office Of The Governor	119	29	24.4	130	41	31.5	125	46	36.8
Administration	1,035	306	29.6	1,032	309	29.9	1,083	316	29.2
Commerce, Community And Economic Development	429	97	22.6	419	106	25.3	408	110	27.0
Corrections	1,757	410	23.3	1,797	425	23.7	1,782	428	24.0
Education And Early Development	236	45	19.1	224	42	18.8	222	43	19.4
Environmental Conservation	419	78	18.6	431	77	17.9	424	78	18.4
Family and Community Services									
Fish And Game	770	80	10.4	738	79	10.7	741	86	11.6
Health									
Health And Social Services	2,894	1,000	34.6	2,893	1,038	35.9	2,742	982	35.8
Labor And Workforce Development	563	142	25.2	564	145	25.7	537	141	26.3
Law	481	97	20.2	469	97	20.7	476	106	22.3
Military And Veterans Affairs	233	65	27.9	253	70	27.7	244	74	30.3
Natural Resources	549	65	11.8	564	68	12.1	547	73	13.3
Public Safety	732	118	16.1	745	115	15.4	771	133	17.3
Revenue	434	126	29.0	437	131	30.0	396	123	31.1
Transportation And Public Facilities	2,525	550	21.8	2,475	566	22.9	2,481	600	24.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,176</b>	<b>3,208</b>	<b>24.3</b>	<b>13,171</b>	<b>3,309</b>	<b>25.1</b>	<b>12,979</b>	<b>3,339</b>	<b>25.7</b>

Note: As of 7/11/2022 the Department of Health and Social Services split into the Department of Family and Community Services and the Department of Health.

MINORITIES EMPLOYED IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF ALASKA STATE GOVERNMENT PERMANENT FULL-TIME 2020 MONTHLY BASE SALARY

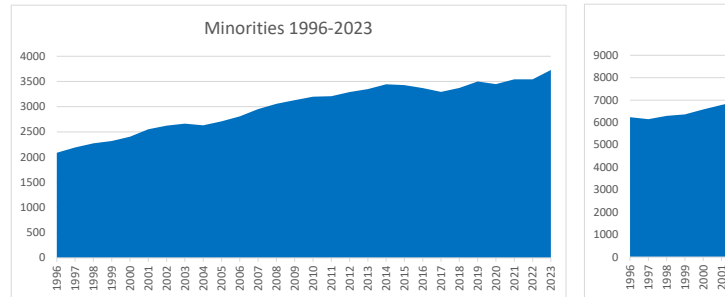
Salary Range	All Employees in the Salary Range	Percentage of All Employees in the Salary Range	Total Minority Employees in Salary Range	Percentage of Minorities in Salary Range
<2,000	1	0.0	0	0.0
2,000-2,999	221	1.7	107	0.8
3,000-3,999	1,714	13.0	685	5.2
4,000-4,999	2,578	19.6	760	5.8
5,000-5,999	2,609	19.8	632	4.8
6,000-6,999	2,132	16.2	417	3.2
>6,999	3,921	29.8	607	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,176</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3,208</b>	<b>24.3</b>

2023 MONTHLY BASE SALARY

Salary Range	All Employees in the Salary Range	Percentage of All Employees in the Salary Range	Total Minority Employees in the Salary Range	Percentage of Minorities in Salary Range
<2,000	0	0.0	0	0.0
2000-2999	72	0.5	49	0.4
3000-3999	1,286	9.8	588	4.5
4000-4999	2,334	17.7	800	6.1
5000-5999	2,489	18.9	706	5.4
6000-6999	1,988	15.1	482	3.7
>6999	4,999	38.0	878	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,168</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3,503</b>	<b>26.6</b>

Note: As of June 1, 2020 all State employees were converted to Bi-Weekly pay schedules. The Monthly Base Salary is calculated as follows: Bi-Weekly Pay Period Rate x 26 / 12

MINORITIES AND FEMALES EMPLOYED BY THE STATE



\*Note: Data prior to 2014 was calculated using 12/31 of each year; in the 2017 report, data is calculated using the fiscal year end (FYE) recalculation of 2014.  
 +Permanent Full-time, Permanent Part-time, Permanent Full-time and Part-time Seasonal

FEMALES EMPLOYED IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF ALASKA STATE GOVERNMENT AS OF JUNE 30 PERMANENT FULL-TIME

Department Name	2020			2021			2022		
	Total Employees	Females	Percentage	Total Employees	Females	Percentage	Total Employees	Females	Percentage
Office Of The Governor	119	77	64.7	130	81	62.3	125	81	64.8
Administration	1,035	560	54.1	1,032	560	54.3	1,083	589	54.3
Commerce, Community And Economic Development	429	247	57.6	419	235	56.1	408	224	54.9
Corrections	1,757	656	37.3	1,797	673	37.5	1,782	659	37.0
Education And Early Development	236	161	68.2	224	157	70.1	222	158	71.1
Environmental Conservation	419	243	58.0	431	255	59.2	424	249	58.7
Family and Community Services									
Fish And Game	770	348	45.2	738	318	43.1	741	318	42.9
Health									
Health And Social Services	2,894	1,979	68.4	2,893	1,973	68.2	2,742	1,839	67.1
Labor And Workforce Development	563	371	65.9	564	365	64.7	537	334	62.2
Law	481	333	69.2	469	317	67.6	476	318	66.8
Military And Veterans Affairs	233	78	33.5	253	78	30.8	244	75	30.7
Natural Resources	549	268	48.8	564	284	50.4	547	278	50.8
Public Safety	732	249	34.0	745	247	33.2	771	254	32.9
Revenue	434	263	60.6	437	256	58.6	396	216	54.5
Transportation And Public Facilities	2,525	645	25.5	2,475	646	26.1	2,481	669	27.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,176</b>	<b>6,478</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>13,171</b>	<b>6,445</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>12,979</b>	<b>6,261</b>	<b>48.3</b>

Note: As of 7/11/2022 the Department of Health and Social Services split into the Department of Family and Community Services and the Department of Health.

**MINORITIES EMPLOYED IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF ALASKA STATE GOVERNMENT 2023**

2023			
Percentage	Total Employees	Minorities	Percentage
3	111	39	35.1
2	1,070	334	31.2
0	454	127	28.0
0	1,807	458	25.3
4	232	59	25.4
4	461	84	18.2
	1,521	678	44.6
5	740	86	11.6
	1,239	370	29.9
3			
3	542	156	28.8
3	503	108	21.5
3	233	74	31.8
3	610	81	13.3
3	816	137	16.8
1	412	126	30.6
2	2,417	586	24.2
7	13,168	3,503	26.6

Hispanics Employed by the State of Alaska 2023		
Permanent Full-time, Permanent Part-time, Permanent Full-time and Part-time Seasonal		
Year	Number Employed	Percentage of Workforce
2023	622	4.4%

Alaska Natives or Native Americans Employed by the State of Alaska 2023		
Permanent Full-time, Permanent Part-time, Permanent Full-time and Part-time Seasonal		
Year	Number Employed	Percentage of Workforce
2023	926	6.5%

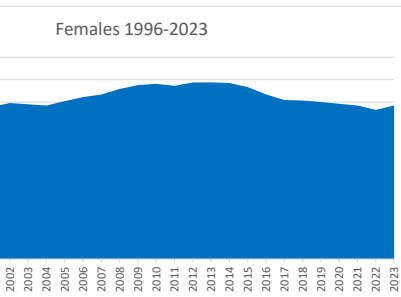
African Americans Employed by the State of Alaska 2023		
Permanent Full-time, Permanent Part-time, Permanent Full-time and Part-time Seasonal		
Year	Number Employed	Percentage of Workforce
2023	465	3.3%

Asians Employed by the State of Alaska 2023		
Permanent Full-time, Permanent Part-time, Permanent Full-time and Part-time Seasonal		
Year	Number Employed	Percentage of Workforce
2023	1,150	8.1%

Pacific Islanders or Hawaiians Employed by the State of Alaska 2023		
Permanent Full-time, Permanent Part-time, Permanent Full-time and Part-time Seasonal		
Year	Number Employed	Percentage of Workforce
2023	171	1.2%

Two or More Races Employed by the State of Alaska 2023		
Permanent Full-time, Permanent Part-time, Permanent Full-time and Part-time Seasonal		
Year	Number Employed	Percentage of Workforce
2023	394	2.8%

**OF ALASKA 1996-2023\*+**



\*) date of 6/30 for each year, beginning with a

**FEMALES EMPLOYED IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF ALASKA STATE GOVERNMENT PERMANENT FULL-TIME 2020 MONTHLY BASE SALARY**

Salary Range	All Employees in the Salary Range	Percentage of All Employees in the Salary Range	Total Female Employees in Salary Range	Percentage of Females in Salary Range
<2,000	1	0.0	0	0.0
2,000-2,999	221	1.7	161	1.2
3,000-3,999	1,714	13.0	1,188	9.0
4,000-4,999	2,578	19.6	1,382	10.5
5,000-5,999	2,609	19.8	1,177	8.9
6,000-6,999	2,132	16.2	948	7.2
>6,999	3,921	29.8	1,622	12.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,176</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>6,478</b>	<b>49.2</b>

2023			
Percentage	Total Employees	Females	Percentage
8	111	75	67.6
4	1,070	589	55.0
9	454	260	57.3
0	1,807	682	37.7
2	232	163	70.3
7	461	274	59.4
	1,521	944	62.1
9	740	326	44.1
	1,239	917	74.0
1			
2	542	330	60.9
8	503	332	66.0
7	233	80	34.3
8	610	305	50.0
9	816	271	33.2
5	412	226	54.9
0	2,417	654	27.1
2	13,168	6,428	48.8

**2023 MONTHLY BASE SALARY**

Salary Range	All Employees in the Salary Range	Percentage of All Employees in the Salary Range	Total Female Employees in Salary Range	Percentage of Females in Salary Range
<2,000	0	0.0	0	0.0
2000-2999	72	0.5	50	0.4
3000-3999	1,286	9.8	844	6.4
4000-4999	2,334	17.7	1,352	10.3
5000-5999	2,489	18.9	1,175	8.9
6000-6999	1,988	15.1	874	6.6
>6999	4,999	38.0	2,133	16.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,168</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>6,428</b>	<b>48.8</b>

Note: As of June 1, 2020 all State employees were converted to Bi-Weekly pay schedules. The Monthly Base Salary is calculated as follows: Bi-Weekly Pay Period Rate x 26 / 12



### Department of Natural Resources

The Department of Natural Resources ("DNR") manages all state-owned land, water and natural resources (excluding fish and game) for Alaskans, as well as 40,000 miles of coastline. The state owns approximately 60 million acres of tidelands, shorelands, and submerged lands in addition to its freshwater resources, all of which equals about 40% of the nation's freshwater flow. ASCHR met with Commissioner John Boyle, Deputy Commissioner Brent Goodrum, and HR Business Manager Brian Blessington.

DNR reports that 50% of its leadership is female, approximately mirroring that of its overall workforce. Although the department is not necessarily targeting women for leadership, DNR attributes the numbers to its reputation of being a great place to work. Having women in leadership sets an example for future female leaders, current employees, and recruits.

DNR gained 61 full time positions during the evaluation period which it attributed to the Division of Forestry's attempt to rebuild wildland firefighting capacity, as well as an increase to the Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys. Although wildland firefighting positions tend to attract more male applicants, DNR experienced a 2%

increase in female employment during this reporting period. Department leadership attributed the increase to its Division of Forestry training program.

Although the department experienced a steady upward trend in minority employment since 2017, including consistent gains over the last three years with a 1.5% increase from 2020, it is still near the bottom of the list when it comes to overall minority employees.

DNR continues to face stiff competition from Alaska Native corporations recruiting for professional land managers, resource specialists, and wildland firefighters for village fire crews; wildland firefighting in particular is the largest employment class in DNR. In response, the department is attempting to hold academies in rural areas to generate interest in wildland firefighting. These academies may have a positive impact on its Alaska Native hiring rate.

DNR is also proud of its non-supervisory representation in its Future Leaders Summit. The program, which is now in its third year, targets internal potential leaders. Leadership reported that 66% of the participants this year are female. ♦

### Department of Fish and Game

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game ("ADF&G") manages approximately 750 active fisheries, 26 game management units, 32 special areas, as well as promotes sustainable fish and wildlife management programs to optimize public uses and economic benefits.

ADF&G showed a net loss from 2020 to 2023 of 1.1% for female employees and a net increase of 1.2% in minority hiring. ASCHR staff interviewed Commissioner Doug Vincent-Lang, Deputy Commissioner Rachel Baker, and Administrative Services Director Bonnie Jensen, who described these changes as not particularly significant;

DNR is maintaining what it generally sees in both its workforce and applicant pool. The department continues to experience difficulty finding qualified candidates in particular specialties. Additionally, ADF&G is trying to hire more Alaska Natives but has difficulty competing with tribal entities that receive federal funding. The department reports having more women and minorities in leadership positions due in part to internal recruiting efforts.

In regard to female employees, the department reported most positions require field operations, which creates barriers as the department experiences difficulty

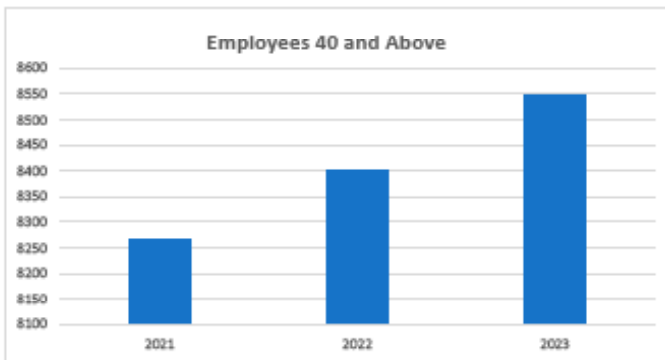
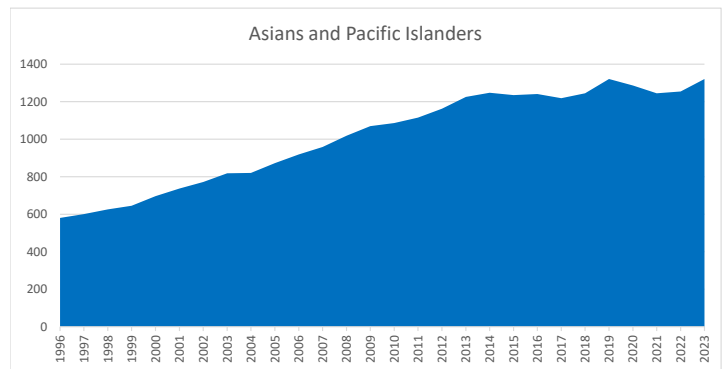
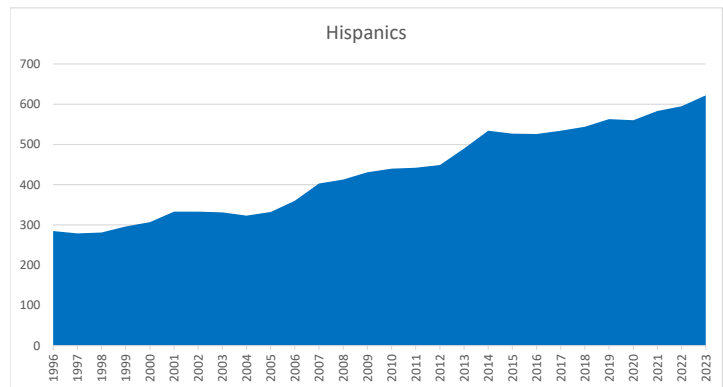
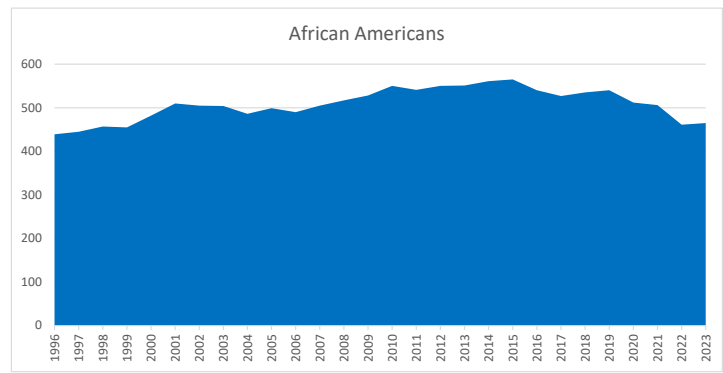
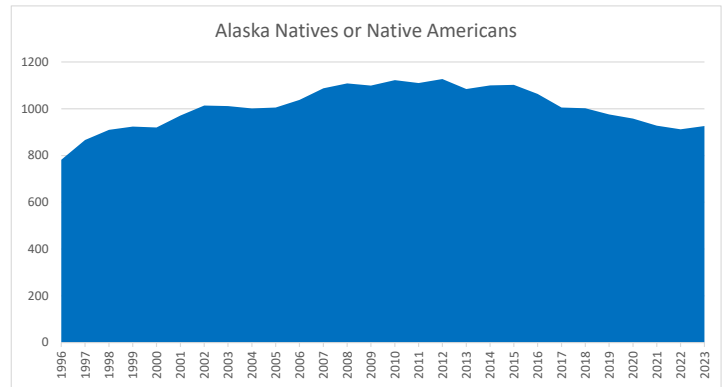


### Alaska Native Employment in the Executive Branch of Alaska State Government 1996-2023+

Year	Number of Alaska Natives Employed	Percentage of Total Workforce
1996	642	4.7
1997	644	4.8
1998	684	5.0
1999	703	5.2
2000	702	5.1
2001	758	5.3
2002	794	5.4
2003	808	5.6
2004	798	5.5
2005	809	5.5
2006	837	5.6
2007	885	5.8
2008	903	5.8
2009	893	5.7
2010	916	5.8
2011	903	5.7
2012	910	5.7
2013	875	5.4
2014	893	5.5
2014 FYE	883	5.5
2015	896	5.7
2016	871	5.8
2017	1,005	6.8
2018	1,002	6.9
2019	976	6.7
2020	958	6.7
2021	928	6.5
2022	912	6.5
2023	926	6.5

Note: Data prior to 2014 was calculated using 12/31 of each year; in the 2017 report, data is calculated using the fiscal year end (FYE) date of 6/30 for each year, beginning with a recalculation of 2014. New EEO race categories are captured in the IRIS HRM payroll system implemented effective 1/9/17; Alaska Native and American Indian or Native American are now combined into one category. +Permanent Full-time, Permanent Part-time, Permanent Full-time and Part-time Seasonal.

### Minorities Employed by the State of Alaska 1996-2020+\*



\*Note: Data prior to 2014 was calculated using 12/31 of each year; in the 2017 report, data is calculated using the fiscal year end (FYE) date of 6/30 for each year, beginning with a recalculation of 2014. +Permanent Full-time, Permanent Part-time, Permanent Full-time and Part-time Seasonal



finding females willing to work in the field. ADF&G's administrative positions are still dominated by women and mid- to higher-level positions are being filled by women from within the department. ADF&G experienced several administrative travel and accounting position transfers to the Department of Administration. As such, lateral transfers from ADF&G to the Department of Administration affected ADF&G's female employee numbers. In response to the department's current employment environment, it is building a pipeline for women and minority leadership. However, as noted by the department, the pipeline is dependent upon external factors beyond ADF&G's control such as college admissions and graduation rates.

In regard to minority employment, the Commissioner reported that the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program through the University of Alaska is making a positive impact. The department also increased its budget for field projects emphasizing local hire, which is attracting more Alaska Native candidates for those positions. However, ADF&G's biggest challenge remains competition from the federal government as those salary and benefits packages are more generous.

Another recruitment/retention challenge is housing. A significant portion of ADF&G's professional staff reside

in local communities with high housing costs e.g., the department has been unsuccessful in retaining an employee in Cordova due to housing costs.

The department created an employee survey in 2021 to review and assess non-monetary aspects of working at ADF&G. The survey enabled the department to improve its overall health by assessing morale, attrition, and increased word-of-mouth recruitment. The department learned it was a "good place to work," but received criticism from women describing challenges they face, resulting in an anonymous harassment reporting system. The department also increased training because the survey revealed field safety needed improvement. The department is hopeful that increased safety training, as well as mechanic training, will have a positive impact on female recruitment and retention in field positions.

In addition to the above, the department's recent efforts include focusing on EEO issues within its immediate control, such as creating a Respectful Workplace Committee. The committee facilitates discussion about diversity, inclusion, and changing workplace cultures where appropriate. The department is also expanding its sexual harassment training program and updating its standard operating procedures for EEO compliance, including sexual harassment complaints. Commissioner Vincent-





Lang pointed out that there are two factors in the minority and female EEO numbers: recruitment, and retention. While creating a respectful workplace in which coworkers feel trusted is something that can be addressed internally,

much of recruitment and retention is outside of ADF&G's control (such as female and minority science graduates, and competition with other employers recruiting from the same talent pool with similar EEO goals). ♦

### Department of Revenue

The mission of the Department of Revenue ("Revenue") is to collect and invest funds for public purposes. ASCHR interviewed Commissioner Adam Crum, Policy Director Llewellyn Smyth, and HR Business Partner Angelica Johnson.

In 2020, the female employee percentage at Revenue was 60.6%, well above the 46.6% of females in the Alaskan civilian workforce, but after some bigger drops in 2021 and 2022, the department ended the reporting period in 2023 with 37 fewer female employees than it had in 2020, representing 54.9% of its workforce. The department recognizes this as a significant drop and attributes it to the COVID-19 pandemic when female employees, anecdotally, were more impacted due to caregiver responsibilities. As for department leadership, three of the four directors are women. Although Revenue recently lost a female director who was succeeded by a minority male employee, Revenue's leadership believes it has a reasonably high

number of mid-level and supervisory employees who are women.

Due to an overall employee loss during the reporting period, the data regarding minority employment reflects that the department experienced a 0.7% gain over the period with 30.6% of Revenue's employees identifying as a racial minority at the end of 2023. Hiring decisions are based on knowledge, skills, and abilities rather than any criteria based on a protected class. Revenue hopes that larger recruitment pools and teleworking options will encourage Alaskans living off the road system to apply for vacant positions; future employees from rural areas could increase minority hiring.

The department has no particular equal employment opportunity initiatives, but opening positions up to statewide recruitment for telework jobs could increase Revenue's Alaska Native hiring rate. ♦





### Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (“DOT”) operates Alaska’s transportation infrastructure, is responsible for maintaining and modernizing the state’s transportation infrastructure and provides both transportation and public facilities services. ASCHR interviewed Commissioner Ryan Anderson, Deputy Commissioner Katherine Keith, and HR Business Professional Mike Rader for the department.

DOT is the only department with its own equal employment opportunity plan, which is updated annually. Leadership tracks the department’s numbers—a 1% change for any category represents almost 30 department employees. DOT’s numbers have been consistently rising for 20 years.

DOT, which has historically been dominated by male employees, saw steady and continuous gains in female hires during the evaluation period, from 25.5% in 2020 to 27.1% in 2023. Although DOT saw an actual loss of both women and minorities from 2022 to 2023, it was relatively proportional to overall job losses for the entire department. The department is facing larger recruitment and retention issues which is exacerbated by inflation as DOT continuously loses employees to higher paying jobs throughout the state.

The department’s leadership recognizes that the types of jobs matter to both men and women, and DOT has what traditionally has been referred to as both blue-collar and white-collar positions, so an examination of job

categories is important. Additionally, the department has implemented an initiative designed to encourage and welcome more women into DOT’s blue-collar positions. For example, the Alaska Marine Highway has a new initiative for affiliations to promote women in the maritime industry along with strengthening policies against sexual harassment in maritime trades—there is a concerted effort to change the culture in traditionally male-dominated jobs like the Marine Highway; labor, trades, and crafts jobs; equipment operators; etc. However, DOT reports that the number of women in management and professional class jobs tell a very different story: of the department’s 24 leaders, 10 are women, including a deputy commissioner.

The department is prioritizing a safety culture for all employees, which includes all aspects of physical safety. Part of that emphasis has led to an increase in female leadership. Particularly for women in arguably more vulnerable positions, like the Alaska Marine Highway, requiring a culture of respect and taking a hard line with strong sexual harassment policies is vital.

DOT recently implemented some substantial organizational changes making it harder to identify mid-level management positions occupied by women. However, DOT reports key women hold some of the lower leadership positions with the Marine Highway System, and a female leads the Fairbanks International Airport who will soon be leading the Anchorage airport too. The department recognizes some disparities in regional leadership but notes it just promoted a female engineer.

Moving over to maintenance and operations positions highlights some of the departments more glaring disparities with female employment. Applications for these positions do not reflect census data, whereas professional class positions have more female employees and female leaders. That being said, DOT is starting to lead the nation when it comes to women in the labor, trades, and crafts jobs, with other states coming to DOT to find out how it is accomplishing its consistent increases.

The department is engaging in strategic outreach targeting females, is hosting its own job fairs, and is shifting its workplace culture. DOT is putting continuous attention on welcoming women in its workplace and trying new things by shifting and re-evaluating its sexual harassment policies. The department is engaging in social media, the Choose Respect campaign, and participating in National Denim Day to honor Sexual Assault Awareness Month. DOT is consistently communicating a message of positive culture in its internal newsletter. It implemented EMBARC (Every Mariner Builds a Respectful Culture) to ensure they are meeting U.S. Coast Guard goals and expectations associated with sexual harassment, and is participating in the Women Offshore maritime program, which is an international body of resources, for all female employees to participate in at DOT's expense.

DOT also made slow and steady gains in minority employment, gaining a net of 36 minority employees during the evaluation period representing a 2.4% increase. DOT thinks the increase is a reflection of the culture shifts within the department, which included hiring a tribal liaison. The department is also increasing training programs in rural hub locations many of which have a predominantly Alaska Native population.

The department asked ASCHR to highlight the training opportunities that can be provided by construction projects. Hughes recently had a road project where the village council partnered with the city to be the contractor. DOT used this as an opportunity to train other

communities in the region. Similarly, DOT lets numerous airport contracts to minority contractors. While these contractors are not state employees and cannot be included in DOT's EEO numbers, it provides potential employees with great exposure to DOT's operations, and the training opportunities the projects present could lead to DOT employment.

DOT is also examining barriers to training, such as the difficulties of obtaining a commercial driver's license in rural Alaskan villages, and what can reasonably be done to eliminate them. The State Transportation Improvement Plan includes \$4 million per year of federal infrastructure funding to invest in training, which extends to providing childcare and housing. In general, DOT's EEO numbers are up for Alaska Natives in skilled labor and maintenance jobs. DOT intends to sustain the trend by amongst other things extending internships to attract engineers from the University of Alaska's Alaska Natives in Science and Engineering Program.

In the next three years, DOT plans to update its annual plan in accordance with federal requirements. It is going to engage an onboarding system and articulate the basic rights and expectations for each job class. The department is working on accessibility to its electronic components. Additionally, due to built-in requirements and DOT's engagement with the FAA, FHWA, and other federal agencies, the department is used to setting Americans with Disabilities Act compliance goals. DOT wants to make itself more tangible to new employees and generally expand the availability of languages to its online resources, including enabling the public to comment in various Alaska Native languages, as well as read and respond to job postings in an applicant's first language. The FAA is auditing DOT, and the FHWA is undertaking a civil rights review of DOT operations during the remainder of the calendar year; these federal agencies deserve credit for providing DOT with advice and training. ♦

### Department of Environmental Conservation

The goal of the Department of Environmental Conservation ("DEC") is "to conserve, protect and improve [Alaska's] natural resources and environment and control water, land and air pollution in order to enhance the health, safety, and welfare of the people of the state and their overall economic and social well being". DEC saw a 1.4% increase in female hires during the reporting period, representing 31 employees. At 59.4% females, DEC exceeds Alaska's overall female civilian workforce percentage. ASCHR interviewed Commissioner Emma Pokon along with Deputy Commissioner Christina

Carpenter, Administrative Services Director Megan Kohler, and because DEC is currently without an HR Business Partner, Camille Brill from the Division of Personnel. The Commissioner believes that her department feels balanced, and more importantly, that DEC is a good place to work not only for females but for all employees. DEC has a number of women in leadership, which demonstrates that women are welcome





and can succeed: in addition to the female Commissioner, the Deputy Commissioner, and much of DEC's senior management are women. 58.7% of the positions at or above range 18 on the salary schedule are women, suggesting that the department has a large part of its leadership and professional classes filled by females.

### Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development

ASCHR staff interviewed Commissioner Julie Sande and Administrative Services Director Hannah Lager for the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development ("DCCED"). For female employment, the department experienced a 0.3% loss due to a larger department employee increase. However, DCCED gained 13 female employees and continues to hover just under the Alaska female civilian workforce with 57.3% of its employees being women. The department underwent significant transition in the last couple years and is focusing on increasing retention by promoting work-life balance.

DCCED lost significant institutional knowledge during the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of female employees leaving to assume caregiver responsibilities, but the trend is reversing in some divisions. Additionally, most of the salary range 18 and higher employees are supervisors, and 49% of employees in those ranges are women.

The department's minority hires saw consistent and significant increases during the reporting period with successive gains ending 2023 with a total of 28.0% of DCCED's workforce identifying as a racial minority. The

### Department of Health

The Department of Health ("Health") is tasked with "Promoting the health, well-being, and self-sufficiency of Alaskans[]" and manages health care services, payment, eligibility determinations, and payments of public assistance program benefits, along with public health for the State of Alaska.

Health really must be reviewed during the reporting period in concert with the Department of Family and Community Services as these two departments were combined as the Department of Health and Social Services ("HSS") through 2022. Health is one of the leaders for female employment, with 74.0% of its employees being women. This tracks with historical data for HSS, which from 2020 to 2022 lost female employees but still had its percentages hovering around 67% to 68% women. Commissioner Heidi Hedberg, who represented her department for this report, indicated Health has many career fields that are traditionally been dominated by females. However, some areas of the department such as

During the reporting period, DEC's minority employee percentage decreased from the previous period by 0.4% even though it gained six net minority employees. The decrease appears to be due to a larger number of overall employees. However, minority retention is better than DEC's total employee retention. ♦

Commissioner is relatively new and has no historical knowledge explaining this trend. The Commissioner expressed that her being a minority female could help normalize minority female leadership throughout the State. The department is engaging in more outreach and showing that DCCED is a place for mentorship, especially for women, minorities, for those from rural upbringings.

The department reports putting more value on work-life balance. For example, DCCED regularly permits employees to take extended 4-week vacations, which gives employees the opportunity to spend time with family overseas.

DCCED's future plans include implementing more skill-based qualifications in hiring and engaging in additional community outreach. Commissioner Sande mentioned that as a minority female she wants to normalize differences in people. In an attempt to realize her goal, the department is looking forward to formalizing a mentorship program by partnering with schools and the University of Alaska. Commissioner Sande also reports the department's EEO progress is based on its culture and credits her predecessor for creating a great one. ♦

IT have more men than women.

Health's minority employee rate is slightly below that of HSS, which trended around 35% from 2020 to 2022, whereas Health sits at 29.9% in 2023.

Health is focused on lowering its vacancy rate. The Commissioner personally hosts quarterly "town halls" with each division to provide updates and address the workplace culture needs: the department's mission is "Promoting the health, well-being, and self-sufficiency of Alaskans," which must begin within the workforce. The town halls are intended to be conversational in nature,



promoting a dialogue during which employees may ask anything.

Additionally, Health collaborated with Qualtrics for an employee satisfaction survey so the department can assess compensation (including benefits and work-life balance), office culture (the employee's passion for Health's mission), and resource management (the availability of job resources).

Although department diversity is not a primary focus, it does have a healthy and equitable workforce program looking at provider diversity.

Health was an early-adopter of switching from minimum qualifications to competency-based qualifications in hiring. That being said, Health necessarily has a large number of providers such as nurses and doctors, and the racial

makeup of that part of the workforce is largely reflective of who is obtaining the degrees required to perform those jobs; Health has observed that the higher the education requirement, the less minorities apply, which is consistent with Health's non-degree job classes having more minorities.

The Section of Women, Children, and Family is a diverse workforce largely because it interacts directly with new moms, including from large Polynesian and Asian communities. The interactions often bring in applicants from those communities. The department is creating Community Health Worker positions for employees to work specifically with Alaska's Polynesian and Pan-Asian communities—given the nature of and qualifications of the position, the likelihood employees will already know the relevant languages, cultures, etc., is high. ♦

### Department of Corrections

The Alaska Department of Corrections ("DOC") provides secure confinement, reformatory programs, and a process of supervised community reintegration for those convicted of a crime to enhance the safety of Alaska communities.

DOC was represented by Commissioner Jen Winkelman. The careers available in DOC remain dominated by male applicants which skews its workforce male. However, the Department saw a small uptick of 26 female employees representing a 0.4% increase during the reporting period. The department has over 2100 employees, with 1000 of them being corrections officers. The Commissioner was pleasantly surprised to see that 37.7% of DOC's workforce is female given that there are more male inmates than female and therefore, more corrections officers must commensurately be males.

Turnover during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic caused DOC to hit a "reset button" on its culture. Similar to a DMVA initiative to encourage diversity, DOC is ensuring that there is gender diversity on hiring panels to make women feel comfortable and welcome coming to a career at DOC. These changes have resulted in a net increase of 50 employees from 2020.

The department has seen consistent growth in minority employment numbers. Minority hiring went up during the evaluation period with 48 additional minorities representing a 2.0% increase. The department's applicant pools have expanded, thereby presenting DOC with

the opportunity to hire more diverse candidates. The department believes that encouraging cultural tolerance and acceptance helps with both recruitment and retention. One example is a facility where Wednesday night has become known for its Wednesday night Filipino potlucks; many of the employees at the facility have a Filipino background and bring their cultural foods to share. In addition to potlucks, the department started bringing in food trucks for employees.

DOC was also encouraged by an emergency regulation promulgated by the Alaska Police Standards Council ("APSC") to allow U.S. Nationals to hold an APSC certificate. Previously, citizens of American Samoa were ineligible for certified law enforcement positions due to this restriction. The department does not yet know if the regulatory change made a difference, however, due to the extremely high rate at which DOC employees left the department due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Commissioner feels strongly about increasing Alaska Native hiring, especially given the amount of Alaska Natives in the offender population. DOC is working with a number of Alaska Native organizations such as Cook Inlet Tribal Council, the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, and the Alaska Native Heritage Center on some of these initiatives. DOC's Deputy Director of Institutions is herself Alaska Native and has been a driving force in this area. ♦

### Department of Administration

The Department of Administration ("DOA") provides centralized administrative services to state agencies in

matters of finance, personnel, labor relations, central mail distribution, property management, risk management,

procurement, retirement and benefits programs, and information and telecommunication systems. DOA also provides indigent defense and children’s advocacy through the Public Defender Agency and the Office of Public Advocacy, vehicle registration and driver licensing through the Division of Motor Vehicles, as well as a host of other services, including administrative responsibilities for the Alaska Public Offices Commission, Alaska Public Broadcasting Commission, and the Office of Administrative Hearings.

ASCHR interviewed Paula Vrana, Commissioner; Dave Donley, Deputy Commissioner; Kate Sheehan, Director of the Division of Personnel; and Camille Brill, Deputy Director for the Division of Personnel; who believe the numbers reflect good, steady progress stemming from solid hiring policies and procedures. The department saw gains in both female and minority hiring during the evaluation period. Female employees went from 560 to 589, a 0.9% increase, while minority employees went from 306 to 334, representing a 1.6% increase. Female employees are well represented throughout the department’s pay ranges, with 47.8% of employees at the range 18 or higher pay scale being female.

Switching to competency based minimum qualifications led to a more diverse candidate pool in terms of both

female and minority applicants. The Department of Administration was responsible for implementing this change statewide and has moved over 300 PCNs to competency-based requirements. DOA noted that the largest growing racial demographic is those individuals identifying as two or more races, which was not historically tracked; now employees have a “two or more races” option on the EEO form.

The largest racial disparity is with Native employees. The State finds itself competing directly with Alaska Native corporations and tribes for this demographic due to a variety of reasons including salaries and benefit packages. The department is trying to compete in other ways by improving its hiring practices to promote the benefits the State does offer. Additionally, hiring managers have received cultural competency training and the department hosts a monthly workforce services meeting to hear from experts in the EEO office on various topics.

The department is required by AS 39.28.040 to adopt an affirmative action plan which was last updated in 2010. A high-level internal discussion is taking place within the Division of Personnel regarding whether to refresh the plan; there is a question as to whether an affirmative action plan is still relevant. ♦

### Department of Education and Early Development

The Department of Education and Early Development (“DEED”) was mired in significant legislative, legal, and public demands at the end of the 2024 legislative session that likely absorbed the department’s entire leadership team and was necessarily its priorities.

Accordingly, DEED did not respond to ASCHR’s meeting request. DEED is tasked with 1) ensuring school funding is appropriately distributed to school districts based on legislative appropriation, by statute, and in accordance with the foundation formula, other formula programs, or legislative intent for funding outside the primary funding formulas; 2) managing state, federal and other funding by providing comprehensive fiscal and administrative services; 3) assisting school districts by providing programs, technical on-site and distance-delivery support, and early intervention services



in efforts to increase the statewide graduation rate; and 4) providing opportunities for, and collaborating with, government entities and other public and private organizations to engage in active partnerships in pursuit of state educational goals.

DEED was near the top of departments for female employment in 2020, with 161 women representing 68.2% of its workforce. The department ended the reporting period with 163 women in the department representing 70.3% of its workforce.

The department ended the last reporting season with 45 of 236 employees (19.1%) identifying as a racial minority. During this reporting season, it saw statistically significant minority gains in 2022 and 2023, ending the evaluation period with 59 of its 232 employees being non-White and representing 25.4% of DEED’s workforce. ♦

### Dept. of Law

The Department of Law (“Law”) is managed by the Attorney General as the principle executive officer of the department. The Attorney General “serves as the

legal advisor for the governor and other state officers, prosecutes all violations of state criminal law, and enforces the consumer protection and unfair trade practices laws.



The duties and powers of the attorney general are found in AS 44.23.020. The Attorney General's Office supports the attorney general as legal advisor to the governor and chief administrator of the three divisions of the Department of Law."

Law provided an unmatched depth of leadership for this year's equal employment opportunity assessment. Hosted by Attorney General Treg Taylor, ASCHR also interviewed Criminal Deputy Attorney General John Skidmore, Criminal Division Director Angie Kemp, Civil Division Director Stacie Kraly, Administrative Service Director Amber Leblanc, and HR Business Professional Kelly Roberson.

Law is one of the few departments showing a significant portion of its workforce as female, besting the percentage of women in the civilian workforce throughout the evaluation period. In 2020, Law employed 333 female employees representing 69.2% of its workforce, and even after three years of consistent percentage drops, Law ended 2023 with 332 female employees representing 66.0% of the department. The department has been consistent with women in management throughout both its criminal and civil divisions; currently, there are more women than men in management: 11 of the 15 Civil Division's section supervisors are women, the paralegal supervisor is a woman, and 4 of the 5 law office assistant supervisors are women. In the Criminal Division, 3 of 9 regional District Attorneys are women.

For minority employees, the department has consistently trended up, moving from 97 in 2020 to 108 in 2023, representing 20.2% and 20.5% of its workforce in those years, respectively. Many of Law's newer minority hires are of Asian descent and the department made a concerted effort to recruit Alaska Native lawyers in particular by

targeting schools with more American Indian and Alaska Native students for recruitment. Like other departments requiring specialized degrees, whether scientific, medical or legal, Law is heavily affected by what demographic is applying to, being admitted to, and graduating from law schools; followed by admission to the practice of law.

Additionally, Law faces stiff competition for attorneys from the private sector, including Alaska Native corporations. For example, Law tried to hire someone who is Alaska Native for its tribal liaison position and recruited an individual working at an Alaska Native corporation. The corporation increased the applicant's pay to effectively outcompete Law.

Further compounding attorney supply, the number of law school graduates has decreased by 10,000 over the last 10 years. In response, the Alaska Bar Association re-evaluated its attorney licensing criteria, refreshing admissions criteria to more closely align with the majority of states. Law was positively affected by the Alaska Bar Association's decision to refresh its admissions criteria, which resulted in a larger lawyer applicant pool. Due to the amount of vacant attorney positions, Law focuses on any and all qualified candidates regardless of their sex, race, or background.

The Criminal Division recently engaged in some targeted recruitment including an African American job fair and job fairs targeting public service. The department is also re-evaluating its internship program and hopes to convert unpaid internships into paid positions. Paid internship programs are highly desired as many students, including female, minority, and those from underprivileged backgrounds, would not otherwise be able to afford a summer working for free during law school. Additionally, the Civil Division is trying to create a fellowship program for law school graduates: the goal is to create a pipeline of interns to fellows as newer attorneys and thus encourage people to make Law a lifetime career. ♦

## Office of the Governor

The Office of the Governor consists chiefly of the Governor's personal staff, the Office of the Lt. Governor (which houses the Division of Elections), an Administrative Services Division, the Office of Management and Budget, and ASCHR. The Office of the Governor's seniormost staff was unable to meet with ASCHR due to legislative demands at the end of the 2024 session. The office experienced a small decrease in the percentage of female employees during the reporting period, down from 67.7% in 2020 to 67.6% at the end of 2023. The Governor's Office

still trends higher than the percentage of civilian women in the Alaska workforce and is near the top when looking across departments.

The office's overall minority employment numbers reflect a trend upward during the evaluation period. The Governor's Office started 2020 with 29 minorities representing 24.4% of the office, and ended 2023 with 39 minorities representing 35.1%, tracking nearly identically with the overall Alaska minority population of 35.9%. ♦



## Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

The Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (“DMVA”) includes the Alaska National Guard, Alaska Military Youth Academy, the State Defense Force, and the Office of Veterans Affairs. It responds and assists in the recovery from domestic disasters and emergencies, serves and supports Alaska’s veterans, as well as educates Alaska teens in disciplined, structured environments.

DMVA was represented by Commissioner Torrence Saxe, Deputy Commissioner Craig Christiansen, Administrative Services Director Bob Ernisse, and HR Business Professional Carina Russell. The department continued its impressive gains in both female and minority employment during the reporting period. The number of female employees rose by a net change of two but given the relatively small number of civilian DMVA employees, those two represented a 0.7% increase. Notwithstanding 34.2% of its workforce being female and the department lagging behind the overall civilian female workforce in Alaska (46.6%), DMVA’s long-term trend is positive. The department strives to respect everyone; be familiar with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives; maintain proactivity in soliciting feedback from employees; and empower hiring managers.

DMVA is proud to report more women in military leadership positions, which it believes leads female civilian employees to see opportunities. The Commissioner’s office staff is mostly female, including the first female senior enlisted non-commissioned officer. The Secretary, Legislative Liaison, and Tribal Liaison are also women.

The department also showed gains in minority employment by adding 9 net employees, increasing from 27.7% of its workforce to 31.8%. DMVA has done lots of one-on-one coaching related to unconscious bias and requires its hiring managers to run all questions by HR ahead of time as an added layer of review, building upon previous efforts reported three years ago.

Commissioner Saxe also requires that his directors be open to feedback, both good and bad, in both one-on-one and in group settings. He remains proud of the department’s work requiring a hiring panel to have a person of the applicant’s race on the panel, which has now become ingrained into the department’s process, because it generates trust and transparency. He meets with his assigned EEO employee once per month, and the department is experiencing less internal EEO complaints than it previously had; complaints are nearly non-existent now.

DMVA plans to maintain its momentum by hosting voluntary focus groups intended to elicit employee feedback on how the department can continue diversifying its workforce. Another program that originated on DMVA’s military side is currently led by the chaplain corps. This “Speed of Trust” program allows people to voice concerns in a way that will still reach command by asking what is going well? What is not going well? What can DMVA do better? Commissioner Saxe wants to bring this program to DMVA’s civilian workforce. ♦

## Department of Public Safety

Ensuring public safety and enforcing fish and wildlife laws is the Department of Public Safety’s (“DPS”) mission. DPS was represented by Commissioner James Cockrell, Deputy Commissioner Bryan Barlow, and HR Business Partner Karen White.

The department went from 249 to 271 female employees between 2020 and 2023. The department attributed this to the large number of non-commissioned positions added to make up for public safety budget cuts during the prior administration. That being said, DPS’s focus remains the Alaska State Troopers (“Troopers” or “AST”). The department shifted some civilian staff to augment the Troopers where possible, such as assisting with reports, helping with intelligence in rural investigations, and the drug unit. The department has approximately 131 vacant commissioned positions with around 161 vacant civilian positions. Because there were more women in the civilian support positions, this likely explains the difference between the percentage of female and male new hires. The department is advertising vacant positions daily as it

continues to rebuild.

The department realized gains in minority employment, with 118 minority employees in 2020 to 137 in 2023, representing a net change of +0.7%.

The department needs to be representative of the communities it serves and recognizes its struggling with recruiting Alaska Natives. Convincing minorities to enter law enforcement has become increasingly difficult, as can be seen in national recruiting statistics. It is noteworthy that forty years ago (1983), every recruit was from Alaska. Now the majority of recruits are from the contiguous 48 states.

The department is redirecting its recruitment efforts to focus on Alaska. In this vein, the department added temporary recruiter positions. Recruiters will focus on population centers, including rural communities such as Bethel.

Like elsewhere in state government, the department is

eliminating minimum qualifications in favor of competency-based standards or broadening the minimums where needed to maintain the position's integrity. The Commissioner mentioned how small but significant changes can have large impacts. He gave an example of a lesson learned 10 years ago involving a female recruit who was having difficulty with the firearm portion of the academy. They took the time to retool her gun, and rather than failing the academy, she passed. This experience encouraged DPS to look more closely at its firearm standards and qualifications. In so doing, it came to light that many women and individuals with small hands failed the firearms qualification. The goals were then further evaluated: the department selected a new handgun,

changing the caliber from .40 to 9 mm while incorporating red-dot sites. These changes benefited smaller proportioned individuals without lowering standards.

The department is also supporting the National Women in Law Enforcement Conference and the NOBLE program, which addresses unique circumstances faced by Black law enforcement officers. DPS is evaluating the process and qualifications for internal promotions as well.

The department is also cognizant of the higher female passage rate in the Trooper academy; overall, only 1-3% of applicants successfully graduate, but a higher percentage of women graduate per capita than men. ♦



## Department of Labor and Workforce Development

The Department of Labor and Workforce Development ("DOLWD") ended the reporting period with 60.9% of its workforce being females while experiencing a 3.6% increase in minority employment. The department attributed a net loss in female representation to remediating redundancies in areas processing unemployment insurance claims, which ballooned at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. That being said, the department remains one of the leaders in female employment.

ASCHR staff interviewed Commissioner Cathy Munoz, Special Assistant Adam Weinert, and HR Business Partner Eric Hotchkiss. DOLWD reports a fairly even distribution of females across the department, including in enforcement positions. However, its leadership team and mid-level management are mostly women, with the Commissioner and six Division Directors all being female.

Most of the department's Administrative Services Division is composed of minorities.

The department reestablished the Office of Citizenship Assistance to help immigrants, including refugees, obtain employment. The office is intended in part to assist immigrants obtain employment which includes state employment. The office has examined various existing barriers to state employment. For example, upon review, the Selective Service check-box on the state employment application was determined to be an unnecessary

hinderance to state employment and was removed; many immigrants could not check the box lest they be subject to potential criminal liability, even though they had no legal obligation, reason, or ability to register for the United States Selective Service. The office also encouraged departments to consider equivalent education and experience obtained in other nations, as well as reminded hiring managers that English fluency may not be required for all jobs since artificial intelligence, digital online translators, and other technology can bridge language gaps.

COVID-19 opened the door to more flexibility within the workspace and presented a more diverse applicant pool by enabling the department to engage in statewide hiring as applicants no longer need to be tied to a particular location. The question for the department is now, "how can we accommodate you?" This includes removing barriers to employment, which is becoming more crucial for state government because the current average employee age is 48-49: impending retirements in the next 10 to 15 years will have a large and potentially detrimental impact on all government departments. Succession planning to mitigate the impending retirement wave is being considered. ♦





### Department of Family and Community Services

The Department of Family and Community Services (“DFCS”) is tasked with managing Alaska’s child welfare system, the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API), and the Alaska Pioneer Homes (AKPH). It is the other half of the former Department of Health and Social Services (“HSS”). In 2022, DFCS was renamed Department of Health. Analyzing DFCS therefore requires reviewing trends from HSS.

HSS historically tended to have a high percentage of female employees; between 2020 and 2022, the percentage of female employees was around 67-68%, which carried over to DFCS in 2023 with 67.4% of its workforce being female. The minority trend was similar, with HSS at around 35% from 2020 to 2022, and DFCS ending 2023 with 44.6% of its workforce identifying as a racial minority, putting DFCS at the top of all state departments.

ASCHR staff interviewed Commissioner Kim Kovol, who readily pointed out that DFCS also has more female minority leaders than other departments, which should not be surprising given that the positions in HSS had a reputation for being female dominated careers fields.

Commissioner Kovol pointed out that the vast majority of nursing positions are still held by women, and there is a high population of pan-Asian female nurses in

Alaska. Additionally, more Alaska Native women are entering the medical fields. This has led to higher levels of Alaska Native placements in the local healthcare industry. Commissioner Kovol wants to show students that when leadership values diversity, there will be career opportunities for minority applicants. In this spirit, Commissioner Kovol takes a personal role by accepting student interns and by speaking at University of Alaska classes.

DFCS was created at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic when direct services had to evolve. The department is trying to provide as many platforms as possible for people to serve their own communities. As with other executive branch departments, DFCS is experiencing workforce challenges, including recruiting and retention. As a result of the labor market’s current dynamics, Commissioner Kovol reports that DFCS is a training ground. If an employee stays in the department for three years, the department considers that a success; an employee who stays 5 to 10 years may stay through retirement. The department recognizes that newer younger employees are part of the digital generation, or as Commissioner Kovol called it, the “insta” generation. The State of Alaska must embrace this realm, which includes constant training, retraining, and reevaluating community interfaces as employees leave.

As for initiatives, Commissioner Kovol put an Alaska Native woman on a hiring panel who changed the standard interview questions. This person, a graduate student intern, was later hired as a permanent employee for the department but as with many new hires is now leaving. In addition, the Commissioner requires a subject-matter expert on each hiring panel. Commissioner Kovol also holds quarterly town halls, three times on the same day at 10:00 am, 4:00 pm, and at midnight for graveyard shifts, to provide informational opportunities during a transparent

conversation between herself and DFCS employees. Division directors also attend.

DFCS has the largest practicum placements of all departments based on agreements with 11 universities, and these placements have brought a significant number of full-time employees to the department. Commissioner Kovol is hoping for another 35 students this year who will likely continue to trend female. The department is not trying to target women, but the reality is that women make up the bulk of the applicant pool. ♦

## Recommendations

- The State should embrace diversity in all forms by removing barriers to executive branch employment. Alaska has the most diverse census tract in the nation due in part to Anchorage serving as a major refugee resettlement city. Providing cultural awareness for hiring managers and removing barricades such as the Selective Service requirement on job applicants that automatically excluded recent Ukrainian refugees will serve to lessen the State's hiring woes and possibly open jobs to minorities. Pursuant to an American Immigration Council report from 2022:
  - About 7.5 percent of the state's residents are foreign-born, and 4.6 percent of its U.S.-born residents live with at least one immigrant parent. Immigrants make up 10.8 percent of Alaska's labor force and support the state's economy in many ways. They account for 45.1 percent of the manufacturing workforce in the state.
- As noted by Commissioner Kovol, the State of Alaska, like all employers, must rethink and reembrace who it is as an employer, particularly in a post-pandemic labor market. Flexible work schedules, including hybrid work schedules and remote work when reasonable for the position, will provide greater opportunities for employees who also have caregiver roles and are frequently women. It will also expand opportunities for minority employees, and Alaska Natives especially, who will be able to work and live in rural villages. Encouraging employees to use their leave for extended absences may keep employees who feel compelled to regularly return to their nations of origin to visit family and maintain cultural connections.
- Leadership should encourage and maintain transparency with the workforce. Both the Department of Health and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs initiated regular "town hall" meetings for employees to dialogue directly with top leadership. This builds trust in the workforce, improves workplace morale, provides an opportunity to publicly laude good work, and creates a feedback loop to improve retention. When a department can regularly communicate its culture to its employees and genuinely hear criticism, it will create a welcoming community for all employees and lessen the fear some employees may have for speaking up about workplace inequality. When a workforce is strong, individual employees talk positively to friends and family about their jobs and encourage those people to apply for vacancies thereby broadening applicant pools. Employees with strong workplace communities and important work friendships, which may include cultural connections with coworkers, tend to stay with their employer for longer periods.
- Departments should expand outreach and create community partnerships at every turn. Nearly every component of State government interfaces with the public in some way, shape, or form. This can be in the form of direct public outreach through fair booths and advertising, or indirect such as through grant-making, contracting, permitting, etc. Each of these touchpoints can be used as an opportunity to create positive public interaction and potentially an occasion to recruit a diverse workforce. Mentorship programs similarly provide chances to retain Alaska's high school and college graduates and show women and minorities that the State is a great place to work. Further showing that women and minorities hold leadership positions in the departments also demonstrates the State's commitment to equal employment opportunity and provides incentive for success. ♦



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