

# Public Safety in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta

Solutions for Making Tribal Communities Safer



2019

Association of Village Council Presidents

Bethel, Alaska

[AVCP.org](http://AVCP.org)



Akiachak, Akiak, Alakanuk, Andreafski, Aniak, Atmautluak, Bethel, Bill Moore's Sl., Cheformak, Chevak, Chuathbaluk, Chuloonawick, Crooked Creek, Eek, Emmonak, Georgetown, Goodnews Bay, Hamilton, Hooper Bay, Lower Kalskag, Upper Kalskag, Kasigluk, Kipnuk, Kongiganak, Kotlik, Kwethluk, Kwigillingok, Lime Village, Marshall, Mekoryuk, Mtn. Village, Napaimute, Napakiak, Napaskiak, Newtok, Nightmute, Nunakauyak, Nunam Iqua, Nunapitchuk, Ohogamiut, Oscarville, Paimiut, Pilot Station, Pitka's Point, Platinum, Quinhagak, Red Devil, Russian Mission, Scammon Bay, Sleetmute, St. Mary's, Stony River, Tuluksak, Tuntutuliak, Tununak, Umkumiut

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# Overview

The Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) is a regional non-profit tribal consortium of the 56 federally recognized Tribes of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Our Region lies along the Nation’s northernmost border and spans 55,000 square miles (approximately the size of the State of New York). Our Region has a population of approximately 27,000+ living in 48 communities along to two major Arctic rivers (the Kuskokwim and Yukon Rivers) and the Bering Sea Coast. The only modes of intra-region transportation available are small aircraft year-round and by boat when the rivers are flowing and, truck, snow machine, or four-wheeler when the river is frozen.

AVCP provides social services that enhance the quality of life of tribal members, programs that support the self-governance and self-determination of our member tribes, and is the voice of the Region on a myriad of issues.



2016  
Public Safety #1 Priority @  
AVCP Convention



May 2018  
Organized Statewide VPSO  
Strategic Planning



Summer 2018  
Conducted AVCP Region Public  
Safety Facilities Assessment



August 2018  
AVCP Region  
Public Safety Summit



January 2019  
AVCP Public Safety Taskforce  
Formed



February 2019  
AVCP Region Tribes Submit  
TLOA Requests



May 2019  
AVCP Public Safety Proposal  
Presented to  
US AG William Barr



August 2019  
DOI Public Safety Listening  
Session in Bethel

For the last three years, our Tribes have prioritized public safety as the number one issue in the AVCP Region. Rural Alaska is facing a public safety crisis, and our Tribes have asked us to look for solutions.

To find solutions, we have consistently engaged with our Tribes and communities, the State of Alaska, and the Federal Government. Through this process we have identified a public safety service delivery model that will work for our communities.

As we explore all potential avenues toward public safety, we know that Alaska Tribes must have criminal jurisdiction to prevent and respond to crimes in their villages.

By partnering with Tribes, the Federal Government, and the State of Alaska, we can make our communities safer. AVCP has created a Public Safety Taskforce to assess the state of public safety in the YK-Delta and to make recommendations for a public safety service delivery model for our Region.

This white paper shares our process and findings.

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# The Public Safety Crisis

The public safety crisis in Alaska's tribal communities is well documented.<sup>1</sup>

**USNews** CIVIC

## Jail Deaths Highlight Ongoing Rural Alaska Safety Issues

A spokeswoman for an Alaska regional tribal consortium says the recent deaths of three people at village jails underscores ongoing public safety problems in rural parts of the state.

By Associated Press, Wire Service Content May 15, 2019

**PROPUBLICA**

**LAWLESS**

## Why We're Investigating Sexual Violence in Alaska

Something has changed in the way Alaskans talk about sexual assault. A yearlong partnership between the Anchorage Daily News and ProPublica aims to highlight the stories of violence and survival in the final frontier.

by Kyle Hopkins, Anchorage Daily News, May 16, 11:29 a.m. EDT

## Domestic Assault In Kalskag Results In Village Lockdown

By GREG KIM (/PEOPLE/GREG-KIM) • MAY 23, 2019

## Search And Rescue Recovers Unidentified Body From Kuskokwim River

By ANNA ROSE MACARTHUR (/PEOPLE/ANNA-ROSE-MACARTHUR) • MAY 21, 2019

## In Marshall, Residents Protect Each Other In A Village Without Police

By TERESA COTSIRILOS • MAR 22, 2018



## Public Safety Persists As Top Issue For Y-K Delta Tribes

By ANNA ROSE MACARTHUR (/PEOPLE/ANNA-ROSE-MACARTHUR) • OCT 5, 2018

### LAWLESS

At least one in three Alaska villages has no local law enforcement. Sexual abuse runs rampant, public safety resources are scarce, and Gov. Mike Dunleavy wants to cut the budget.

By Kyle Hopkins, Anchorage Daily News

May 16, 2019

This article was produced in partnership with the Anchorage Daily News, a member of the ProPublica Reporting Network.

**LAWLESS**

## How We Tallied Alaska Villages Without Local Law Enforcement

We asked more than 500 organizations representing 195 communities if they employ a police officer of any kind. Of that number, 70 communities reported having no police at some point in 2019.

by Kyle Hopkins, Anchorage Daily News, and Alex Mierjeski, ProPublica, May 16, 11:29 a.m. EDT

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<sup>1</sup> See A Roadmap for Making Native America Safer, Chapter 2 – Reforming Justice for Alaska Natives: The Time is Now (The Indian Law and Order Commission's Report to the President and Congress of the United States)

[https://www.aisc.ucla.edu/iloc/report/files/Chapter\\_2\\_Alaska.pdf](https://www.aisc.ucla.edu/iloc/report/files/Chapter_2_Alaska.pdf).

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# Statewide VPSO Strategic Plan

In May 2018, the ten Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) Program Tribal Contractors and the Alaska Department of Public Safety met to develop a strategic plan for the Statewide VPSO Program. The strategy that was identified was:

- (1) Communication: branding/identity; building and strengthening partnerships/relationships at all levels; and community engagement
- (2) A VPSO Available in Every Community: funding; strong talent recruitment strategy
- (3) Program Governance: consider innovative and flexible ways to accomplish the VPSO program, i.e. compacting
- (4) Adequate Funding & Policy Influence through Key Stakeholder Outreach
- (5) Define VPSO Roles & Responsibilities.

AVCP is ready to work with the State of Alaska to achieve these goals.

The full Strategic Plan can be accessed [here](#).



## AVCP Public Safety Facilities Assessment

In May and June of 2018, the AVCP VPSO Program along with AVCP Facilities, Information Technology, Legal, Communications, and Administration traveled to 45 communities in the AVCP region to conduct general facilities assessments on Public Safety buildings and infrastructure. This information identifies the need for additional infrastructure for Public Safety in the AVCP region. The assessment identified existing and non-existing Public Safety facilities and Public Safety housing in the region.

Of the 48 communities in the AVCP region, 38 have existing Public Safety Facilities. 4 of these facilities require major renovation or replacement. 24 of these facilities require renovations. 9 communities in the AVCP region don't have any public safety facilities and 26 of communities do not have dedicated public safety housing.

The AVCP Region lacks public safety services and infrastructure. In the few communities that have law enforcement, the Tribal Police Officers (TPOs) and Village Police Officers (VPOs) lack adequate equipment and often work in substandard buildings. In emergency and disaster situations, the tribes and community members who respond without adequate public safety are placed in dangerous situations and often must go into lockdown to remain safe. To provide these services, the communities require adequate public safety facilities and housing.

The condition of the Public Safety buildings in each community vary greatly. Some are in very poor condition and are recommended as uninhabitable, while others are in new or very good condition. Most facilities are found to be in-between, needing various amounts of attention to correct safety deficiencies.

AVCP estimates the cost to address this issue to be:

Replacement of 4 existing Public Safety facilities - \$1.28 Million

Renovation of 24 existing Public Safety facilities – Phase I - \$300,000

New Public Safety facilities for 9 communities – \$2.88 Million

New Public Safety housing for 26 communities - \$6 Million

The full Facilities Assessment can be accessed [here](#).

ASSOCIATION OF VILLAGE COUNCIL PRESIDENTS  
**Public Safety  
FACILITIES ASSESSMENT**

Summer of 2018



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# AVCP Public Safety Summit

On August 1-2, 2018, AVCP hosted the Public Safety Summit at the Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Center. The theme of this summit was Public Safety: Addressing Barriers and Identifying Solutions in the Y-K Delta. The public safety summit provided a forum for tribal leaders and public safety providers to guide our work in addressing public safety issues and improving the well-being of our communities.

The Public Safety Summit addressed the following categories: What is Public Safety; Current Status of Law Enforcement – Alcohol and Substance Abuse; Tribal Courts/Circle Sentencing; Parenting and Community-Based Solutions; Success Stories: What is working for our Communities? What do we want Public Safety to look like in our region; Public Safety Priorities by Unit; and Community Based Actions and Solutions.

The following challenges were discussed at the Public Safety Summit: alcohol and drugs, no law enforcement, lack of support for law enforcement, decreased National Guard presence, lack of funding, deficient tribal courts, and that law enforcement is a normal service that is provided throughout the rest of the United States. Proposed solutions identified were: Healthy Families, public safety starts at home, increased community involvement, tribal courts, increased collaboration, training, state involvement, support for current law enforcement, and further development of community programs.

Participants at the Public Safety Summit realized that most communities in the region are facing similar public safety issues and that TPOs have power that they didn't know they have and need additional training.

It was recommended that there are additional Public Safety Summits to follow-up on topics discussed, incorporating culture, adding another day and allowing additional



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time for discussions. Another recommendation was to include more elder and youth in discussions.

Public Safety will continue to be a priority of the AVCP Region until community members have achieved the basic need of feeling safe in their communities and their homes.

The Public Safety Summit Outcomes Document can be accessed [here](#).

## Tribal Law and Order Act Requests

In February 2019, 43 of AVCP's Tribes submitted Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA) requests to the Department of Justice requesting the United States to assume federal criminal jurisdiction over Indian country in the AVCP Region. A Meeting between requesting Tribe and the Department of Justice is scheduled for February 2020.

## U.S. Attorney General William Barr Visits Alaska

In May 2019, U.S. Attorney General William Barr visited Alaska. On May 31<sup>st</sup>, he traveled to the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta where he met with AVCP's Public Safety Taskforce in Bethel before traveling to Napaskiak where the Napaskiak Traditional Council presented him with a "Resolution to Request for a Declaration of Emergency."

During his visit to Bethel, AVCP's Public Safety Taskforce presented the **AVCP Tribal Safety and Wellness Proposal: Phase One** to both Attorney General Barr and Senator Murkowski. The full proposal can be accessed [here](#). The abstract is below -

# AVCP Tribal Safety & Wellness Proposal: Phase One

## Introduction

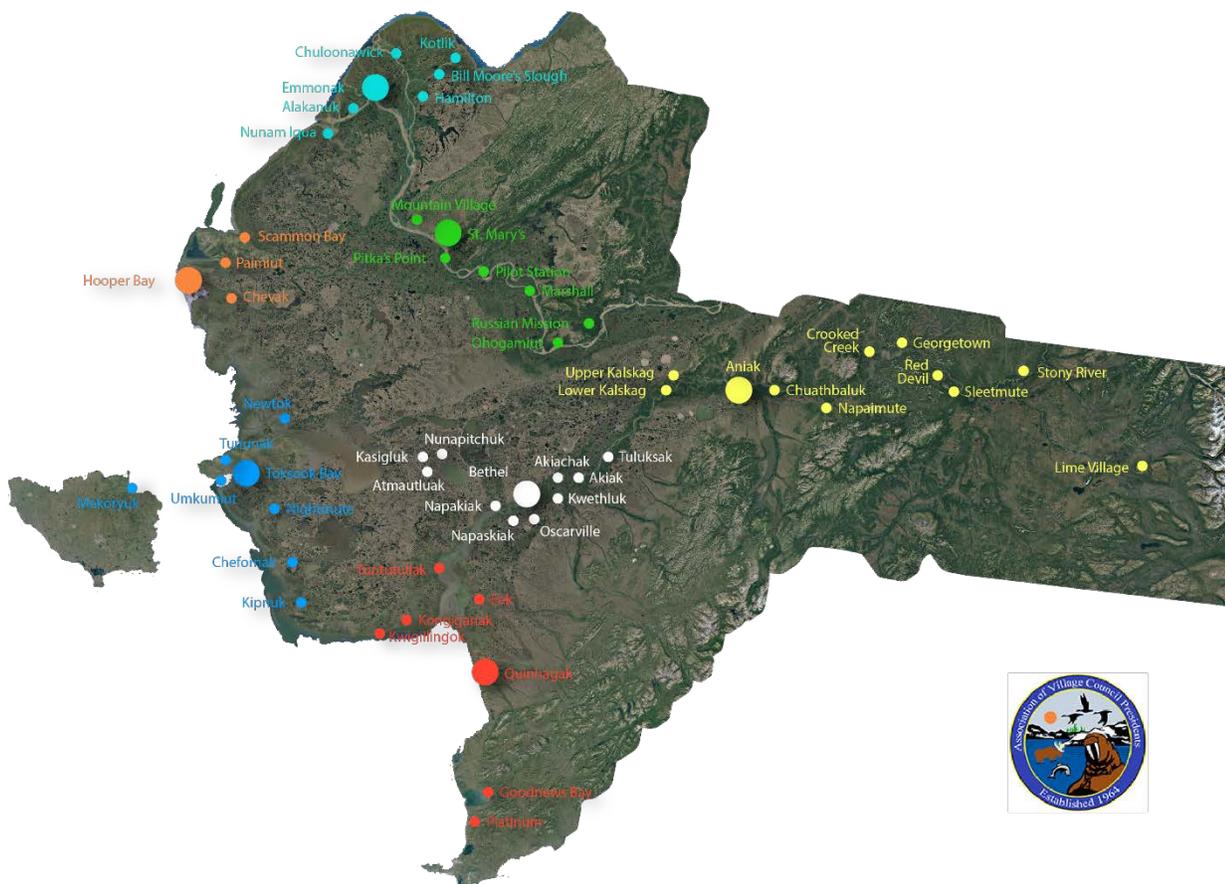
The Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) is the largest tribal consortium in the Nation, with the Region's 56 federally recognized Tribes as members. The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (YK-Delta), located in Western Alaska, is part of the Arctic and consists of 48 physical communities which lie along the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers and Bering Sea. Spread across an area the size of the State of New York, these communities are not connected to each other by a road system. The 27,000+ residents' only access to each other and the rest of the State is by open river in the summer, ice road or frozen tundra in the winter, or plane.

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*AVCP's long-term goal for comprehensive tribal public safety in the YK-Delta is to provide full-time law enforcement and access to justice in the tribal court system for all tribal communities.*

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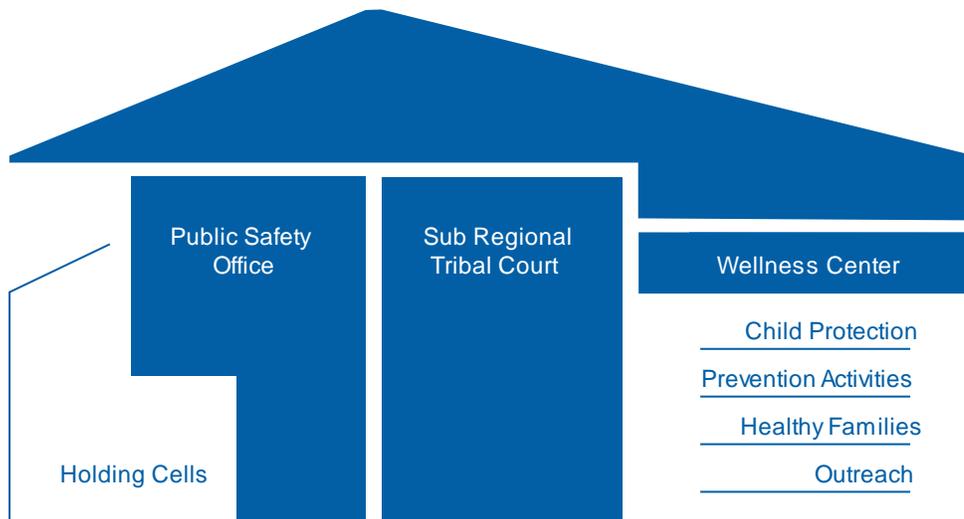
**AVCP's immediate proposal to address the Region's public safety crisis is to provide public safety coverage and access to justice through a sub-regional model.**



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## Phase One: Sub-Regional Tribal Safety & Wellness Centers

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AVCP's Public Safety Taskforce proposes a holistic approach to public safety in the YK-Delta by basing services out of seven sub-regions (see map). Each Sub-Regional Tribal Safety & Wellness Center will serve six to eight federally recognized Tribes and/or tribal communities in the AVCP-Region. The seven centers will provide full public safety coverage to all 56 tribes/48 communities in the YK-Delta.

### Sub-Regional Tribal Court

- Panel judges are cross-trained on individual tribal codes; judges rotate in from each Tribe.
- Panels hear child protection cases; family law cases (adoption, custody, divorce, child support, name change, and guardianship); domestic violence cases (protective orders); and criminal cases (criminal violations of protective orders and tribal criminal codes).
- Alternate panels serve as court of appeals.
- Panels also hear cases referred through State of Alaska's Civil Diversion Agreement.

### Sub-Regional Public Safety Office

- Three tribal law enforcement officers based in each sub-region.
- Provide coverage throughout the sub-region on a TDY (Temporary Duty Yonder) basis (respond to crimes, community policing, prisoner transport).
- Employ jail guards on an as-needed basis.
- Officers are cross-deputized under agreement with State of Alaska (can enforce both State and Tribal law).

### Holding Facilities

- Sub-regional short-term holding facilities for three to four prisoners at a time.
- Temporary holding facilities in each community.

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## Wellness Center

### Tribal Child Protection

- Houses the Community Family Support Specialist (CFSS) supervisor who supervises six to eight village-based CFSS workers.
- CFSS workers are case workers in tribal child protection cases and are case managers/liaisons for ICWA-compliance in State of Alaska child protective cases when Tribes have intervened.

### Healthy Families

- A holistic approach to family and community wellness through the sharing, teaching, and practice of traditional values.
- Offer workshops in villages, sub-regions, and Bethel.
- Sponsor cultural activities for families and children that include connecting them with elders, sharing local plant knowledge, and other activities rooted in our indigenous values.

### Prevention

- Preventing future Tribal or State child protective services involvement through early intervention for at risk families.
- Refer families to AVCP services (e.g. Benefits; Vocational Rehabilitation; Healthy Families; Tribal Workforce Development; Education, Employment and Training; Child Care, etc.).
- Provide one-on-one coaching and mentoring for parents as needed.

### Safety Outreach

- Provide All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) safety courses and safety gear (e.g. helmets).
- Perform winter trail marking and maintenance for faster response time to public safety emergencies and to reduce injuries and deaths that occur when traveling between villages on ice road trails.

## Public Safety Housing

### Tribal Law Enforcement Housing

- Provides housing for up to three law enforcement families.

### Temporary Safe House

- Provides a temporary shelter for victims of domestic violence who need an immediate safe place to stay.



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## Phase One Priority Needs

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*Estimated Cost: \$130 Million*

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### Infrastructure

**Current:** No adequate multi-function tribal court/public safety buildings exist in the AVCP Region.

**Proposal:** seven centers – one in each subregion (see map).

**Current:** Housing is a severe impediment to recruiting and retaining tribal law enforcement personnel. There are only two women’s shelters in the entire AVCP-Region (Tundra Women’s Coalition and Emmonak Women’s Shelter).

**Proposal:** seven multi-housing units – one in each subregion (see map).

### Personnel

**Current:** Only six full-time law enforcement officers for 48 communities; no full-time court staff in any community.

**Proposal:** 21 full-time law enforcement officers serving 48 communities; 7 full-time court staff for 7 sub-regional courts.

### Training

**Proposal:** Intensive training/cross-training and ongoing technical support for tribal court judges and court staff provided by AVCP’s Tribal Justice Department. Yuut Elitnaurviat (<http://yuut.org/>) will provide training for tribal law enforcement officers (in collaboration with AVCP’s Tribal Justice Department for cross-deputization training).

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# Western Alaska Emergency Response Center

In addition to law enforcement officers, public safety facilities, and tribal court infrastructure, AVCP has long advocated for a Western Alaska Emergency Response Center.

Due to the increased traffic along the Bering Sea Coast and the logistical challenges of traveling from the hub community of Bethel to the other communities, the need for a coordinated response plan to emergencies in Western Alaska is critical. The AVCP Region lacks a current comprehensive regional disaster preparedness recovery and resiliency plan. In emergency and disaster situations, the various organizations who respond are in a reactive position. AVCP's plan for the design and development of the Western Alaska Emergency Response Center is an opportunity for Western Alaska to become proactive. AVCP has donated an 8,400 square foot building, located adjacent to the Kuskokwim River, for this purpose. AVCP plans to involve all stakeholders, including Tribes, regional and State entities and programs, in the planning and implementation process.

The Western Alaska Emergency Response Center will:

- Serve as the headquarters and training center for the regional Village Public Safety Officers (VPSO) program, as well as be available when necessary to other agencies and programs involved in emergency and disaster management (local Search and Rescue groups, local and State law enforcement, visiting federal or military personnel, etc.).
- Centralize and improve coordination of public safety and emergency responsive preparedness and activities for Tribal, local, State, and Federal law enforcement personnel as well Search and Rescue groups.
- Secure centralized storage for emergency response equipment.

AVCP estimates it will cost approximately \$4 million dollars to renovate an 8,400 square foot, two-story steel building adjacent to the Kuskokwim River that AVCP has donated toward this project.

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# U.S. Department of Interior Public Safety Listening Session

In February 2019, AVCP requested a roundtable discussion on public safety held in the AVCP Region. On August 21, 2019, the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) hosted a Public Safety Listening Session in Bethel, Alaska.

Forty-four Tribes provided [comments](#) on the state of public safety in their villages and requests for assistance from the Federal Government. The tribal recommendations and requests for assistance included these themes:

- Tribes need non-competitive, permanent and direct funding for public safety
- Compacting for public safety
- Infrastructure development and public safety housing is a need
- Training for tribal law enforcement officers
- Better response times from Alaska State Troopers
- Tribal court development
- Interdiction for drug and alcohol smuggling
- Partner agreements with neighboring Tribes and State agencies
- Rotational/roving public safety officers
- Community-based solutions

At the conclusion of tribal comments, AVCP’s CEO requested that AVCP be a demonstration site for a public safety model that includes compacting funding through multiple federal agencies.

#### Listening Session Participants

Akiachak Native Community; Akiak Native Community; Village of Alakanuk; Algaaciq Native Community; Village of Aniak; Village of Atmaultluk; Village of Cheforak; Chevak Native Village; Chuloonawick Native Village; Village of Crooked Creek; Emmonak Village; Native Village of Georgetown; Iqurmiut Traditional Council; Kasigluk Traditional Council; Native Village of Kipnuk; Native Village of Kongiganak; Native Village of Napakiak; Native Village of Napaskiak; Village of Bill Moore’s Slough; Native Village of Chuathbaluk; Native Village of Eek; Native Village of Goodnews Bay; Native Village of Hamilton; Native Village of Hooper Bay; Native Village of Kwinhagak; Native Village of Marshall; Native Village of Napaimuit; Newtok Village; Native Village of Paimiut; Native Village of Scammon Bay; Native Village of Tununak; Nunakauyak Traditional Council; Native Village of Nunam Iqua; Organized Village of Kwethluk; Orutsarmiut Traditional Native Council; Oscarville Traditional Council; Native Village of Pitka’s Point; Village of Sleetmute; Native Village of Tuntutuliak; Tuluksak Native Community; Umkumiut Native Village; Village of Lower Kalskag; Village of Kalskag; Yupiit of Andreafski

The White House; US Department of the Interior; Bureau of Indian Affairs; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Alaska Federation of Natives; Office of Senator Murkowski; Office of Senator Sullivan; Association of Village Council Presidents

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*AVCP has asked for protection and safety of our families and tribal communities... We are not asking for anything less or anything more than any other community in Alaska or the United States.*

*Vivian Korthuis, CEO*

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