

**COMMISSIONER JOE SCHMIDT'S SPEECH TO
THERAPEUTIC COURT GRADUATION, NOVEMBER 5, 2007
Anchorage, Alaska**

Good afternoon. The department of corrections and the court system share a common goal. We enhance the safety of our communities.

Corrections uses traditional methods, secure confinement, reformative programs and supervised re-entry. And we remain available for those who cannot function in society, or are actively threatening the safety of the community.

In January of this year, the Alaska Judicial Council released the results of their study of criminal recidivism in Alaska.

Criminal recidivism in our state is currently 66 percent. This number tells us that two-thirds of the people booked into the system are repeat offenders. It tells us that too many Alaskans are living in a cycle of criminal behaviors. And it tells us there must be a better way.

While a traditional structure has its place, we need to look outside the box and try some different ideas and methods. While an offender occupies a prison bed, they are unable to work to support themselves or their families. They are unable to maintain daily contact with their support network. And for many, no one in the community is meeting one on one to measure progress or pitfalls. While a person is incarcerated, they are on their own to accept programming and no external motivation may exist to remain committed to it.

As our prison beds continue to fill, and our out of state contract becomes larger, programs like this one are ever more valuable.

Valuable not only to the economy, as this program allows offenders to function in society as they work through their issues. And not only valuable to the prison system, which should only house those who present the greatest danger to the public. And not only valuable to the offender, as their best chance at success. But valuable to the community, as any reduction in recidivism means a reduction in victims.

Programs like this step out of the box, and the players take on different roles. There is no place for adversarial relationships as both sides work to the same goal, which is the success of the offender -- keeping the offender focused on their program, and holding them accountable when needed.

The constant vigil from the officers of the program shows a genuine interest in safer communities -- an interest in a systems approach to criminal justice, and reducing our states high rate of criminal recidivism, and a genuine interest in the offender.

To the graduates of the program, I offer my sincere congratulations.

I've been told that for some of you, this may have been the single hardest accomplishment of your life. And today's commencement is just that...a commencement.

Today is not the end of a program. Today is the beginning of a new way of life. Today is another step in your journey to life free of crime. I am happy to be here in support of all of you – and to be here in support of this program. Good luck to all of you, and again...congratulations!

Thank you