

**Alaska Rural Justice and Law Enforcement Commission**  
**Public Testimony**  
**Submitted April 14, 2005 from Bethel, Alaska**  
**From Police Investigator Charlie Seidl**

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My name is Charlie Seidl. I am an Investigator with the Bethel Police Department and have been for three and half years. I am 28 years old. I grew up in Koliganek and Dillingham, so I have an understanding of what rural law enforcement is all about.

We need a new police station in Bethel, Alaska. A new police station will improve police officer morale and contribute to much-needed professionalism in the police ranks. Folks walk in to our police station now and often don't view us as professionals because of our working environment.

The design of the current station is inefficient for the modern police work that we do. The building suffers from old age. It is hard to keep clean. We need to clean it constantly. Our computers and electronic equipment are sensitive to dust and airborne contaminants. Our datamaster (breath test instrument for DUIs) gets so hot in our building that it won't allow us to obtain breath samples. This has been a problem for us in court when we submit the datamaster results as evidence. I have had to put a fan on the datamaster to cool it down enough so that it will function. I should not have to work under these conditions. The pocket testers for doing breath samples are good for the field, but can't be used in court.

The temperature in our building in the summer time gets too hot. When you factor in the gear that we wear as police officers (uniform shirt, pants, boots, ballistic vest, and duty belt), it is very uncomfortable to work in the building. For every arrest we make on the streets, we have to spend about 40 minutes typing up reports and completing other paperwork. We must spend time in the office. It's part of our jobs. We need a pleasant, temperature-controlled work environment.

Our sewer system is horrible. On occasions, the sewer system has backed up so much that it has almost made me vomit. It is disgusting! The stink comes in through the floor. There is a wooden trap door with just duct tape used to seal the cracks. And it's right in the middle of our "kitchen." I shouldn't have to smell sewage when I come to work.

We need a room to process DUIs. The room should have a rubber-type of floor like other police stations have to protect the inebriated individuals being processed. We have a hard, tile floor now. We also need a camera for recording the processing event. The camera would help insure the safety of the individuals being processed and help us document the behaviors exhibited in the processing room. We need a processing room that is plain, with very few items in the room that can be used as weapons against us or themselves. We process DUIs in the squad room now. Our squad room consists of a small hallway with four cubicles full of office equipment. Any of the office equipment can be used as weapons against us. We have to be on guard and extremely vigilant when processing DUI cases. When we process DUI arrests now, we often experience inebriated individuals yelling and cursing at us. This type of disruption makes it very disruptive to other officers when they are using one of the other cubicles to type up their reports.

We need a designated interview room that is set up to record interviews with the latest digital audio and video technology. It is important to record the interviews to serve as documentation for evidence in court. When it is your word against *his*, it makes a big difference in court when the judge or jury can see a person's demeanor on the screen. The ability to play back an audio/video recording gives the judge and jury the whole perception of what is going on.

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We need an interview room that is sound proof. Right now, just as an officer is getting into intimate details that affect a person's life, someone will walk by or cause a distraction by virtue of being in the same room. These distractions disrupt the flow of the interview. We need one-way glass so that other officers and experts can monitor the interview and glean insight from how the suspect carries himself or herself. A sound proof interview room with one-way glass would also allow us to do line-ups. We can't do line-ups right now. We have to use pictures. Using photos doesn't have the same power as a live line-up.

The Bethel Police Station is currently limited on space available to store evidence. Our indoor evidence room is full. Over a weekend, all of our evidence lockers can be filled up. If we lose the chain of custody on our evidence for a case, we can lose the court case. It is crucial that we be given enough space to store our evidence—and in Bethel, we gather a lot of evidence. Our evidence room is full of guns, knives, ammunition, and booze.

Our indoor evidence room is not as secure as it should be. We have a deadbolt, but there is damage to the inside of the door frame where someone tried to break into the room. Our evidence needs to be stored in a secured vault, especially guns, knives, and booze. Once in our custody, we don't want our hard-earned evidence to be stolen and end up back on the street. Also, our evidence room and vault should be fire-resistant, like they are in most police stations. We do not have fire resistant walls or a fire resistant door right now. There is no air circulation system in our evidence room. We store confiscated drugs in there and some of those drugs are toxic to the handler or passerby. This is a huge safety issue for anyone of us who works in the room. Someone could bring a lawsuit against the City for this situation.

We have evidence from old cases that we have to store out in the shed because we don't have the space inside the building. The evidence stored outside gets musty and moldy and has degraded in quality and usefulness.

Our squad room consists of four cubicles in a row with a narrow hallway in front of each of them. We have two people sharing the same work space. In other police stations, each person has his or her own desk. Our paperwork gets jumbled up sometimes. One day, we had an oil leak in the Toyo stove and no one wanted to go back there because it reeked.

For a 15 minute call, I will spend 40 minute to an hour doing paperwork. There are many types of paperwork that must be completed, copied, and filed, including search warrants, affidavits, criminal complaints, and reports. We need our own space to complete these important documents.

The most common crimes that we experience in Bethel are domestic assaults, serious assaults, DUIs, and property theft. Most of our crimes are committed by individuals under the influence of alcohol. Some of the snowmachine and boat thefts are done by young people who take them joyriding and then trash the stolen property and leave it in town or out on the tundra.

Our dispatch center needs improvement. It is very crowded in there. The dispatchers are vulnerable when they are in the building alone. The window separating their work stations from the public entryway is bulletproof, but the walls next to the window are not. Someone that was upset after being arrested by a police officer could come in and shoot bullets through the walls—into the dispatchers' room and/or into the hallway beyond our locked door. We have had some very upset people come into our entryway and scream obscenities, but so far we have been fortunate to have not had an incident with a weapon. Many dispatch centers have cinder block walls and bullet-proof windows. We should be providing that level of security to our dispatchers.

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The Bethel Fire Department has a garage bay for vehicles. The Police Department does not. We must keep our vehicles running outside in the winter time to keep them warm and ready for use. Keeping a vehicle running outside in the wintertime means that each of us needs two sets of car keys, one to keep in the ignition while the car is running, and one to keep on our person to open the locked door and access the vehicle. When we share vehicles, a particular automobile could be running 24 hours a day. Our vehicle maintenance cost and vehicle replacement cost is high due to the heavy demands we put on the vehicles. Another problem that we experience now is that when our vehicles are soiled by blood, vomit, stool and other biohazards from people we pick up, there is no place to clean the vehicles. We desperately need a heated garage to clean our vehicles and keep them in top condition.

The police department snowmachines and four-wheelers are currently stored in the City's *bus barn*, which is located on the other side of the street, down a short road. What used to be a bus barn, is now the City's storage area for all nine City departments. The bus barn is too far away to make practical use of the two snowmobiles and two four-wheelers that the City owns to apprehend wrong-doers.

Last year, someone on the shore of the Kuskokwim River told us that there was an inebriated person in a boat endangering himself and others on the river. It took us at least 15 minutes to get our boat on the trailer, hook it up to a vehicle's tow hitch, tow it to the small boat harbor, and then launch it. Time is of the essence when we get calls to respond to an incident. Every life is valuable and we need to be able to respond immediately with our police boat. We need to have our boat in the water, ready to go in a moment's notice. This would be possible if the new police station were built with river access. At a minimum, we could store the boat in a heated garage and shave some minutes off of our response time.

Sincerely,

Charlie Seidl  
Bethel Police Department Investigator