

On Monday, I will sign the criminal justice reform bill into law—but a portion of Senate Bill 91 needs to be fixed.

The massive criminal justice reform package had bipartisan support. Senator John Coghill, a Republican from North Pole, championed the legislation, which Senator Johnny Ellis, a Democrat from Anchorage, strongly advocated.

After the bill passed the Legislature, advocates for victims of sex trafficking alerted us to two sections of the bill that create a potential loophole affecting the state's ability to prosecute sex traffickers. I am very grateful to the members of Priceless Ministry for their attentive review of the bill.

The intent of sections 39 and 40 was to prevent the prosecution of prostitutes who band together for protection from being charged as sex traffickers. The intent was not to deny justice for sex trafficking victims.

The fix is simple. I will amend my special session call to add a standalone bill repealing the specific language that could potentially hinder the prosecution of sex traffickers. I do not want to unravel all the important reform efforts in SB 91.

The criminal justice reform bill makes a number of very positive changes. A 13-member criminal justice commission—comprised of judges, prosecutors and members of the law enforcement community—spent seven months participating in a rigorous, data-driven process that led to 21 recommendations.

Each recommendation was rooted in research, and most were modeled after successful policies in other states. Those recommendations became SB 91. The bill was vetted through more than 50 hearings in five legislative committees. It passed with two-thirds majorities in both the House and the Senate.

For the past decade, criminal justice policy has been developed without data or research. That needed to be changed. Senate Bill 91 is a reform effort aimed at maximizing the public safety return for each dollar spent.

Alaska has the highest per-capita rate of violent crime and one of the highest recidivism rates in the country. Rather than continue to spend more money on longer sentences that did not change criminal behavior or reduce crime, the Justice Reinvestment Initiative redirects some of those resources into proven strategies.

Senate Bill 91 reinvests \$99 million over six years into crime-reduction programs, such as substance abuse treatment, re-entry services, pretrial supervision, violence prevention and victims' services. Senate Bill 91 is expected to produce significant savings to the state by

averting projected growth in the prison population and reducing the current prison population by 13 percent over the next decade. The reforms are estimated to save a total of \$380 million (\$211 million in direct net savings; \$169 in savings from averted growth).

These reforms are working in other states:

- South Carolina has seen a 12 percent reduction in crime since reform was adopted in 2010.
- Kentucky has seen a 17 percent reduction in crime since adopting reform in 2011.
- South Dakota has seen an 8 percent reduction in crime since adopting reform in 2013.
- Texas stopped building more prisons and invested instead on programs proven to reduce recidivism. The state has now averted \$3 billion in prison costs, and crime has declined 26 percent--the lowest since 1968.

All of these states reduced their prison populations and reinvested in crime-reduction strategies.

The current approach in Alaska is not working. It can be likened to taking a broken car to a mechanic who only has a wrench and a screwdriver. More time in the shop with the same limited tools won't fix the car. Senate Bill 91 provides more tools.

About 9 in 10 of our prisoners will eventually return to our communities. Our task is to ensure proper supervision and treatment to change criminal behavior. Lower recidivism rates mean fewer prisoners and fewer victims, and a healthier, safer Alaska for all of us.