

Police Officer — Palicuuskiiq, Palit'saq

MAANI PALIT'SAT AMLERTUT. – THERE ARE MANY POLICEMEN HERE.



Photo: VPSO Jim Cedeno, photo courtesy of the Kodiak Area Native Association.

Although police officers are a relatively new addition to Alutiiq villages, law enforcement is not. Until Alaska achieved statehood and its communities fell under a state judicial system, Alutiiq leaders acted as peacekeepers and judges. A village's traditional council, led by a locally appointed chief, maintained order, kept track of residents, organized search-and-rescue missions, acted as a court system, and determined punishments for those who behaved inappropriately.

With the advent of statehood, state police became increasingly visible in rural villages. Today, the Alaska State Troopers serve Alutiiq villages with the help of village public safety officers or VPSOs.

The Village Public Safety Officer Program began in the late 1970s as a way to provide rural Alaska communities with public safety services. Because most state troopers are stationed in population centers far from rural villages, rural towns needed local people trained to manage emergencies.

With state funds and administrative assistance from regional Native organizations, small rural communities now train and hire their own public safety officers. VPSOs complete a training course at the Alaska Public Safety Academy in Sitka and then return home to help with law enforcement, fire fighting, search and rescue, water safety, and emergency medical services. Each VPSO works with an Alaska state trooper stationed in their region. Today there are more than eighty VPSOs serving Alaska communities, including five VPSOs in Alutiiq villages whose positions are administered with help from the Kodiak Area Native Association.