



Joel Davidson <editor@alaskawatchman.com>

DPS Statement: Mat-Su Valley Mental Health Call

1 message

McDaniel, Austin J (DPS) <austin.mcdaniel@alaska.gov>
To: "McDaniel, Austin J (DPS)" <austin.mcdaniel@alaska.gov>
Cc: DPS Public Information Office <dps.pio@alaska.gov>

Tue, Jan 24, 2023 at 3:38 PM

Good afternoon media partners –

Thank you for your recent inquiry regarding an incident that was broadcast on Facebook Live last week that showed the Alaska State Troopers involvement in a mental health call in the Mat-Su Valley. Typically, specific information regarding these incidents is protected under AS 47.30.845; the Alaska Court System has recently released information which contradicts the actions and statements of the Alaska State Troopers that responded to the call. The Alaska Department of Public Safety has opted to provide additional information regarding our portion of the incident that we would typically not provide to protect the privacy of the involved Alaskan. Please find a statement from the Alaska Department of Public Safety below:

On January 18, 2023, at around 11:00 am, the Alaska State Troopers received a request from complainant 1 to conduct a welfare check on an adult female in the Mat-Su Valley. Complainant 1 told dispatchers that the female was not answering the door and that he had concerns for her mental health. Around 11:45 am, an Alaska State Trooper responded to the residence and spoke with the complainant 1 and the adult female. Troopers determined that the adult female was not exhibiting signs of grave disability from a mental health issue and was not likely to cause serious harm to herself or others and therefore did not meet the conditions for emergency detention under AS 47.30.705. The Trooper departed the residence at 12:10 pm.

At 4:48 pm, complainant 2 contacted the Alaska State Troopers in a 911 call stating that she had a signed order from a judge that the adult female from the previous call was to be involuntarily committed to the nearest mental health evaluation facility. Two Alaska State Troopers arrived at the residence at around 5:10 pm and were presented a document that complainant 2 alleged was signed by a judge and authorized the transport of the adult female. Troopers observed that the document appeared to be signed by a judge and appeared to be valid. Troopers made contact with the adult female and advised her of the judge's order. The primary Trooper assigned to the call acknowledged that the female was not exhibiting grave disability from mental health and was not likely to cause serious harm to herself or others. Under the authority of the court order Troopers proceeded to transport her without incident or force to Mat-Su Regional Medical Center. They arrived at around 5:45 pm for the mental health assessment. Troopers escorted the female into the hospital and staff from the hospital escorted her into the facility. At no time did Troopers exercise the authority granted to peace officers to perform an emergency detention of the adult female as allowed under AS 47.30.705.

On Friday, January 20, 2023, it was brought to the attention of the Alaska Department of Public Safety that the documents that complainant 2 presented to Troopers may not have been a court order authorizing the involuntary commitment of the adult female. DPS Commissioner Cockrell ordered a full review of the incident. DPS immediately requested copies of the court documents associated with this incident from the Alaska Court System to determine if they were authentic. The Alaska Court System denied the DPS request. We also requested copies of the documents from complainant 2, however they declined to provide Troopers with copies of the documents. On January 24, 2023, the Alaska Court System issued a public statement stating that there was no valid court order for the adult female's involuntary commitment. This was the first official confirmation from the Alaska Court System that DPS has received that the court order that was presented was not valid. With this new information Troopers now believe that the document that was presented to Troopers by complainant 2 was not a valid court order for involuntary commitment. Commissioner Cockrell has requested a full internal review of the policies and procedures of the Alaska State Troopers to ensure that incidents like this do not occur in the future.

“Based on the limited information we have been able to learn about this incident from the Alaska Court System it appears that we made a mistake by transporting the adult female for an evaluation. Our staff should have taken additional steps to verify the information presented by the complainant and the validity of the court order,” **stated Alaska Department of Public Safety Commissioner James Cockrell**. “We take full responsibility for this and want to assure the public that we are taking necessary steps to ensure that incidents like this never happen again. This type of situation is unacceptable, and you have my commitment that we will do better.”

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Sincerely,

Austin McDaniel

Communications Director

Alaska State Troopers – Department of Public Safety

Anchorage: 907.269.5413

Mobile: 907.744.6587

austin.mcdaniel@alaska.gov