

Escape rate plummets

Health and social Services Commissioner Frank Williamson reported recently that escapes from Alaska's jails were reduced by 64.7% during 1976. In 1975, 29 prisoners walked away from pre-release furlough programs, one fled while being transported, and four broke out of jail, as compared to eight walk-aways and four breakouts in 1976. Williamson said there have been no escapes thus far in 1977.

There is no doubt in my mind, Williamson said, that the implementation of many of the recommendations of the Governor's Task Force on Corrections by Corrections Director William Huston is largely responsible for the dramatic decline in escapes.

We've got antiquated, overcrowded institutions, but we've taken the most effective steps possible, in line with the Task Force Recommendations.

Under Huston, the Division of Corrections has added middle management positions for security, classification, and training, streamlined and clarified institutional procedures; and instituted a mandatory training program for Corrections Officers and supervisors at the Public Safety Academy in Sitka. Sixty-seven percent of Corrections Officers now on duty have completed the course in Sitka.

Huston also said that modifications have been made to the jails to increase security, though overcrowding is reaching crisis proportions.

I began this job, Huston said, with the knowledge that security is the key to virtually every facet of an effective Corrections system in Alaska, including rehabilitative programming. Without security and careful classification of inmates, the Division can't even begin to do its job.

Huston said that of the four 1976 breakouts, three were from the Sixth Avenue Annex, a pre-sentence detention facility in Anchorage currently operating well over emergency capacity and originally designed as a city jail.