

# NEWS RELEASE—MARCH 18, '08

Follow-up to the recent news story, "Alaska prisons and jails- one of the largest providers of mental health services."

1. We believe even convicted criminals have a right to medical treatment for a mental illness in a setting that optimizes the opportunity for recovery. And that may be a hospital setting. The new state psychiatric hospital only has a 10 bed forensic unit and there is a waiting list.
2. Civilly committed and voluntary psychiatric patients have a right by law to be kept separated from forensic patients and those awaiting trial for crimes.

If a civilly committed or voluntary psychiatric patient is put into jail, they must be kept separated from the prisoners. Conversely the same rule should apply, but the state, because they are running out of room at the state hospital, wants to start mixing forensic patients with voluntary/ civilly committed patients.

Alaska Psychiatric Institute's CEO, Ronald Adler, said he would accept a contempt of court ruling if forced to mix forensic patients with civilly committed/ voluntary patients. Dr. Maile, one of 2 doctors in charge of the API forensic unit, said he did not agree with the state wanting to mix forensic patients with civilly committed/ voluntary patients.

API is a 74 bed state mental hospital with 5 units. One unit, 10 beds, is for forensic patients. As patient advocates, we believe there should be a larger forensic unit. And we also don't believe the state should use non-forensic units at API as a halfway house for sexual predators and violent criminals. Just as important, civilly committed and voluntary patients have a legal right to be kept separate from criminals.

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