

Brent Johnson
Alaska House District 6

Please indicate whether you view domestic violence and sexual assault as an area of primary concern for you.

Primary concern Secondary concern Not on my radar
Primary concern

Are you familiar with local programs that provide domestic violence and sexual assault services to victims across Alaska?

Yes Somewhat No
Yes

If yes, how often do you interact with the domestic violence/sexual assault shelter or victim services program in your area?

Quarterly Annually Other
Other

If other please specify:

I've run in the LeeShore Center's annual Violence Free Community Run 10K for the last two years. My neighbor, Dr. Kristie Sellers served as Director of Behavioral help at Central Peninsula Hospital. She oversaw Serenity House Treatment Center for several years and I talked with her about her programs frequently. As a KPB Assembly member I had a standing invitation to her to help with her programs. Much of this was related to drug and alcohol addiction but those illnesses are related to various other abuses.

1. The Alaska Victimization Survey (AVS) found 57.7% of Alaskan women have experienced intimate partner violence (domestic violence), sexual violence, or both. What is your vision for Alaska when it comes to reducing sexual assault and domestic violence? What steps are you prepared to take to get there?

In 2022 the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was reauthorized. That helped victims with legal assistance, housing, and focused aid to recognized marginalized groups. It also provided a pilot program for tribal courts to prosecute non-Native perpetrators for sexual assaults, stalking and domestic violence in Alaska Native Villages.

The VAWA is federal law and funding is set to expire in 2027. I'll ask the Alaska legislature to ask Congress to extend funding. I'm also in favor of classes in middle and high schools that teach about safe-dating and consent. I think we need to build on the Me Too Movement in making sexual harassment and sexual assault a matter of constant public awareness. And I will maintain an open door to groups like Haven House in Homer and the LeeShore Center in Kenai. I believe they will provide me with ideas and events that will reduce domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse.

2. What responsibilities do you believe the Legislature and other elected officials hold in advancing efforts to prevent domestic violence and sexual assault?

It's up to the Alaska Legislature to give society legal protection against sexual harassment, abuse and violence. And to fund help for women and children who don't have an income. And to prosecute perpetrators.

What efforts have you made at the local, state, and federal level to address domestic violence and sexual assault?

The Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly, of which I was a member for 12 years, recognized April as sexual assault awareness month. And October as domestic assault awareness month. In spite of such awareness, Pamela Wastell, Mayor Charlie Pierce's executive assistant filed a lawsuit charging him with sexual harassment, verbal abuse and retaliation. I was President of the Assembly when that lawsuit was filed. Mayor Pierce resigned and the KPB paid a settlement to the victim. That ordeal was in some ways typical of a country that wants to ignore these violations and to the end Mayor Pierce had friends who didn't believe he did anything wrong. That experience will always be fresh in my mind as I assess ways to prevent sexual harassment and abuse.

3. Would you be willing to increase the current level of funding for victims' services?

Yes No Maybe

Yes

4. Would you be willing to increase the current level of funding for domestic violence/sexual assault prevention work?

Yes No Maybe

Yes

5. Would you be willing to increase the current level of funding for legal services for victims?

Yes No Maybe

Yes

6. Currently, the domestic violence response is largely a criminal justice response. Do you have ideas for other types of responses? What are they?

Alaska can direct Crime Victim Funds to be available for victims, giving them a choice to get out of harms way. But the federal government has been reducing these funds and Alaska needs to step in where the federal government fails. Alaska has a chapter of Women in Safe Homes (WISH), similar to Foster Homes for children. I think that's a good program. Alaska needs to

expand child care assistance so women can have jobs because a job empowers women with security.

7. Do you think the penalties for sexual violence crimes in Alaska are:

Too harsh Too soft Just right

Too soft.

What are your reasons?

I think this pertains to men mostly. And it's my impression that they engage in sexual violence because they think they can get away with it. I'm not sure increased prison time will change that, but I think if more men find a legal system that is willing to convict perpetrators, it will lead to fewer attacks and to less aggression.

8. Do you think the penalties for domestic violence crimes in Alaska are:

Too harsh Too soft Just right

I don't think one answer fits all cases.

What are your reasons?

Jail time for abusers can certainly help victims on a short-term basis. I think abuser therapy can be successful, especially if men enter such programs voluntarily. I also think women should get out of any relationship with a history of domestic violence. Back to the question, penalties already match the level of abuse. So that's good. And Alaska laws are strict. Yet Alaska has one of the highest rates of domestic abuse, over twice that of New Jersey (the state with the lowest rate). That seems to indicate that Alaska needs to do other things than depend on harsh punishment as the only deterrent for abuse.

9. Would you support funding through the Department of Corrections to engage individuals who choose to harm their partners/families through batterers intervention programming (BIPs)? Do you think this is the responsibility of the government? Why or why not?

I want to but I don't have much confidence in BIP programs. I do think it is the responsibility of the government because our government is "... for the people." Women and children are certainly among the people. Even abusers are people and a goal of incarceration for domestic violence should include rehabilitation.

What would be your ideas for providing services to people who choose to cause harm to their partners?

Give them an option to enroll in a batterer's intervention program. I've already noted how unsuccessful they are. Certainly, they should enroll in programs to become drug and alcohol free. And give up owning guns. They should make use of any time incarcerated by taking

classes to better their education. That could help with improving their job prospects, which might, in turn, decrease financial stress.

10. Do you believe abortion access should be legally protected for survivors of rape or incest?

Yes No

Absolutely Yes!

11. The state of Alaska is experiencing a housing shortage statewide. This is impacting domestic and sexual violence survivors' ability to move forward with their lives. What would be your ideas to address this?

The Legislature should be briefed by the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation to learn ways to reduce the housing crisis.

12. Children are a particularly vulnerable population and may be traumatized by living with an abusive person and witnessing violence perpetrated against a parent or caretaker. What remedies might you suggest to provide protection for these children?

Government funded education programs for women who have children and are in this predicament. And government funded housing for a year or two while women are enrolled in classes that can lead to jobs. Finally, government subsidized childcare so women can work and survive financially. My answer is simplistic in that some women who are abused are also drug addicts or alcoholics. Putting children in foster care is a possible remedy.

13. A sunset review is a mandatory, periodic evaluation of an executive board or commission to determine if its public benefit justifies its continued existence, funding, and legal authority. The Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA) in the Department of Public Safety is scheduled to sunset June 30, 2028, and will be reviewed during the next Legislature. Would you support a bill to extend the Council?

Yes No Maybe

Yes.

What are your reasons?

The evaluation will be important to show what is or isn't working. If changes are recommended I will want to evaluate them.

14. Please explain any solutions you would propose to support victims and hold offenders accountable for their actions.

My solutions will be to support programs that are succeeding to help victims. StrongHearts Native Helpline, the National Domestic Violence Hotline, LeeShore Crisis center in Kenai and Haven House in Homer. The News Media does a good job in most cases of informing the public when politicians are perpetrators, like they did with Rep Eric Swalwell, Senate candidate

Graham Platner, and Rep Tony Gonzales. In each of these cases the politician did not voluntarily resign until forced to do so by public and political party pressure. It must never be okay to go without repercussions for committing the crime of domestic violence or sexual assault.