



# Pacific Community of Alaska

3001 Porcupine Street Anchorage, AK 99501

907-891-9996 (CHW) | 907-727-9399 (DV/SA) | Email: [info@pcalaska.org](mailto:info@pcalaska.org)

December 16, 2025

The Hon. Mike Dunleavy  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 110001  
Juneau, AK 998811

Dear Governor Dunleavy:

Thousands of American Samoans have made Alaska home. Alaska now has the second-highest concentration of Samoans of any state and is in the top five by absolute numbers. Unfortunately, nearly a dozen American Samoans in Whittier, Alaska are now facing up to 5-10 years in jail simply for following the guidance they received from state and local officials. We, the undersigned American Samoan and Pacific Islander organizations, stand with our people and encourage more dialogue and education rather than punitive prosecution.

American Samoans are hard workers who contribute to Alaskan communities in innumerable ways. Their status as U.S. Nationals brings a whole host of confusion that regular, everyday people must navigate while they struggle with the daily challenges of putting food on the table and ensuring their children a good education. Federal, state, and local governments share in this confusion as well – with the rights of American Samoans often depending on what state or what city they've chosen to move to. This, on top of a general lack of general knowledge about most U.S. Territories, means confusion and misunderstandings are a part of everyday life for American Samoans. There are numerous examples:

- When American Samoans lawfully apply for the Permanent Fund Dividend, many have automatically been registered to vote even when they indicate they are a U.S. national and not a U.S. citizen.
- American Samoans have been told by DMV officials to check the “U.S. citizen” box in the absence of an option to indicate their status as a U.S. national.
- Local elected officials in Alaska have sometimes told American Samoans they are eligible to vote in local elections, encouraging them to register, vote, and even run for office.
- There are also reports that state judges have required American Samoans to serve on state juries even though only U.S. citizens are permitted to do so.

Misunderstandings like the one that happened in Whittier have also happened in Oregon and Hawaii. Yet, in those situations, these states chose to address the underlying systems that caused those misunderstandings, not sanction those for whom there is no evidence that they acted maliciously or with the intention to do anything except get a driver's license that would enable them to work and pay taxes in the State of Alaska.



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Now, members of the American Samoa community face up to 10 years in prison for administrative mistakes and misunderstandings. We cannot help but struggle with this prospect as we know so many of our families and friends who have left American Samoa to live stateside do so in search of a better life. American Samoans are Americans who are as free to move and live in whatever state and territory they choose, and this group chose to make Whittier their home. Not only that, but they have been recognized by the broader community as integral and valued members.

We agree that misunderstandings like this should never happen, and we hope you will consider a different path to furthering education and corrections to the system. We urge you to reconsider whether criminal prosecution is the best avenue when it seems clear the problem here is a lack of education and understanding.

Sincerely,

Tafilisaunoa Toleafo  
Executive Director  
Pacific Community of Alaska