

James E. Cockrell
Commissioner

www.DPS.Alaska.Gov



Department of
Public Safety

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

MEDIA ADVISORY

Two Alaska State Troopers awarded for bravery and lifesaving

Trp. Garrett Stephens and Trp. Nathan Hollenbeck both risked their own lives to save people from drowning in frigid waters earlier this year.

Dec. 2, 2025 (Anchorage, Alaska) -- The Alaska Department of Public Safety and Gov. Mike Dunleavy are proud to present Trp. Garrett Stephens and Trp. Nathan Hollenbeck with an award for lifesaving and bravery today in a ceremony in Anchorage. In separate incidents, both troopers risked their own lives by entering frigid waters to save Alaskans from drowning.

"Alaskans rely on our troopers to protect them and save them. The actions Trp. Hollenbeck and Trp. Stephens took showcase their dedication and commitment to our great state," Gov. Dunleavy said.

"Thank you to Trp. Hollenbeck and Trp. Stephens for their brave actions and thank you to all of the troopers who put their own lives on the line to make our state safer."

Trp. Hollenbeck rescues man from Tanana River

Around 2:30 a.m. on May 29, Trooper Hollenbeck was called from sleep while on standby to respond to a report of a man struggling in the Tanana River. He arrived at the scene within minutes of the 911 call and found the victim approximately 15 feet below a steel dock.

After securing a tow strap to his patrol vehicle and attempting to lower it to the man—who was too hypothermic to grasp it—Trooper Hollenbeck fashioned a makeshift rescue harness around himself. He called for medics with a boat or hoist and then descended toward the victim, entering the icy water.

For roughly 30 minutes, Trooper Hollenbeck kept the man's head above water until a rescue boat arrived. Both were severely hypothermic and transported to a local hospital.

Because of Trp. Hollenbeck's selfless and swift actions, the man survived and was released from the ICU several days later.

Trp. Stephens rescues teenage boy from Mat-Su lake

On the afternoon of June 10, Trp. Stephens responded to an urgent report of a 17-year-old boy drowning roughly 75 feet from the shore of a Mat-Su lake. He was the first to reach the scene and without hesitation sprinted toward the shore and dove into the 42-degree water.

As he swam, Trp. Stephens continuously encouraged the victim to fight for survival. Arriving medics threw Trp. Stephens two life vests. He donned one and swam the second to the victim, who was drifting in and out of consciousness and vomiting water. Trooper Stephens secured the life vest onto the teen and then swam both of them back to shore—using one arm to swim while supporting the boy with the other.

The teen was treated for water inhalation and severe hypothermia. Doctors later confirmed that without Trp. Stephens' fast response, the boy would likely have died.

"The heroic actions of Trooper Hollenbeck and Trooper Stephens represent the very best of the Alaska State Troopers," Commissioner Cockrell said. "I am so proud to have such brave and dedicated troopers serving our state."

Alaska State Troopers put their lives on the line every single day, but the actions of these two troopers exemplify the department's deep commitment to protecting and serving Alaskans. Trooper Hollenbeck and Trooper Stephens demonstrated extraordinary bravery, selflessness, and decisiveness during moments when seconds truly mattered.

Both Trp. Stephens and Trp. Hollenbeck were presented with a Commissioner's Commendation during a ceremony at the governor's office on Dec. 2.

###