

Doniece Gott

From: Lori Xiong [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 20, 2024 7:57 PM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Help Fund Head Start

Please fund Head Start with the full 20% match against federal funding... increase funding through the Department of Education from \$6.8 million, which has been the funding level since 2010 and is now only 11%, to the full match of \$12 million. These funds will serve Alaskan children and families - helping them to be more prepared for success in school; in over 100 communities around our state.

Lori Xiong

Doniece Gott

From: Lauren Wild [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 20, 2024 3:28 PM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: State Budget Public Comment

Hello,

I am a parent and a UAS professor here in Sitka, Alaska. Over the past 5-10 years the childcare crisis in Sitka and the state of Alaska has grown innumerable, and it is alarming the situation we find ourselves in. Last year we had a great addition to the budget with \$7.5mil and those impacts and momentum are actually starting to trickle down to communities which is really positive and wonderful to see. We need more, and we need the momentum to continue! Sitka is seeing increases in wages, and in the last 6 months we've seen a slight increase in the capacity of toddlers in licensed care facilities, from 14 to 17 students (14% coverage, still dismally low overall).

I am writing to advocate for increased funding for child care by providing state funds to match the amount the federal government currently invests in Alaska Child Care Program. This increased funding should be used to:

- Support recommendations from the Governor's Child Care Task Force
- Increase funding for both Child Care Assistance and the Child Care Grant Program.

This additional funding would help lower child care costs for families and increase support for child care businesses. We have a lot of great ideas that we are beginning to put into action and would love to see state support, which will help match some municipal funding sources we are working on getting for the industry.

Thank you for your time,

- Lauren Wild

Senate Finance Testimony

February 20, 2024

Good morning, my name is Marianne Mills and I am the President of AGENet, Alaska's Association of Senior Service Providers. AGENet stands for Alaska Geriatric Exchange Network, primarily made up of private non-profit organizations founded in Alaska.

AGEnet's goal is to help older Alaskans age in place, supporting them to live safely in their own homes and communities for as long as possible and avoid costly institutional care, such as hospitals and nursing homes. AGENet strives to involve senior service providers in every area of the state so that, statewide, older Alaskans receive the local, community-based services they need.

Today, on behalf of AGENet, I urge you maintain the current FY24 funding level for Senior Community Grants. Offered through the Alaska Division of Senior & Disabilities Services, community-based services made possible by these grants include nutritious meals with daily safety checks, transportation, exercise classes, and light-housekeeping. There are also services to help older Alaskans with disabilities, such as adult day services, assistance with activities of daily living such as bathing or dressing, and counseling or respite services for their unpaid family caregivers to help them continue to care for their loved ones at home.

Maintaining the current level of funding requires adding \$2.7 million in general funds, without which services to older Alaskans throughout the state will decline significantly, risking their ability to live independently. With Alaska having the fastest growing senior population in the United States, helping them age in their own homes makes economic sense. Last year, nearly 20,000 older Alaskans benefitted from senior community grants at a cost of only \$691 per year per client. In contrast, only 1,152 patients were served in Alaska nursing homes at a cost of \$148,101 per year per person.

Also, since the population of Alaska seniors age 75 and older increased 5% last year, with more vulnerable seniors to serve, AGENet members urge you to support an additional \$998,231 for a 5% increase in SDS Community Based Grants for Fiscal Year 2025.

Community grants awarded by the Alaska Division of Senior and Disabilities Services help Alaska's seniors to age in place. These grants offer a winning solution to our aging population. Older Alaskans prefer to stay in their own homes while these grants offer the least costly type of care.

Most of our member agencies depend on grants to pay for staff and other expenses associated with senior services. The Alaska Senior & Disabilities Senior Community Grants that are critical to helping local seniors remain safe in their own homes and communities include the following:

- Nutrition, Transportation & Support

- Adult Day
- Senior In-Home
- Family Caregiver Support
- Health Promotion & Disease Prevention
- ADRD (Alzheimer's disease and related dementias)
- Medicare Counseling and Outreach
- Center for Independent Living Grants
- Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)

Thank you for the opportunity to communicate our requests and explain the importance of SDS Community Grants. For more information, please contact me at (907)723-0226.

Doniece Gott

From: Lou Theiss <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Wednesday, February 21, 2024 9:10 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Senior Community Grant testimony

Committee members,

Lou Theiss Girdwood. As a 75 year old aging in place and witnessing my neighbors of 45 years doing the same I want to say a little about the Turnagain Arm and the importance of Senior Community Grants. Seniors are Alaska's fastest growing demographic. The request for an increase in funding is about way more then "senior boxes" delivered to Girdwood, Hope, Indian and Bird.

Senior grants from the state provide a structure that enables a multiplier effect.

Other funders step in to fill voids in the state program. The city recently gave a grant to increase food bank capacity in Girdwood. Volunteers rally their time to serve and stretch these grants. Churches and non profits step in to add funding. Donations come in from neighbors. State grants also add legitimacy for grants from private foundations. Alaska Community Foundation is an example.

Please consider the synergies and leverage that will be produced by adding in this budget request. Our communities get enabled to enhance senior services by a strong State commitment to keep our seniors home, aging in place, and strengthen community bonds in the process

Respectfully Lou Theiss

Doniece Gott

From: Alex Koplin [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 22, 2024 1:00 PM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Cc: Sen. Gary Stevens; Jenny Martin
Subject: comments for all three operating budgets

Dear Senators,

I appreciate you taking the time to meet today in regards to these budget operations. I imagine you have numbers in mind as you discuss the matters at hand. As an Alaskan for 36 years, and an advocate for elections; and working together; I ask you to rethink how to go about making Alaska more united and less divided. I think you have a great opportunity to help fix this. The number one priority for me in these budget meetings is to fund education correctly, I believe that all public education should be a place where magnificent things go on and the community is engaged; in hopes that everyone is fully respected and understood. I also think this is a great opportunity to start thinking as a state rather than individual districts because then we can be whole and work together to move forward towards the same goals instead of becoming more divided.

I appreciate you taking the time today to read this and hear my voice. I have been teaching the students of Alaska in communities and the villages for the last 36 years.

Regards,

Alex Koplin

Doniece Gott

From: Elizabeth Ripley <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, February 22, 2024 8:51 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Cc: Angela S Cox; Ashley Peltier; Esther Pitts
Subject: SB188

Dear Senate Finance Committee:

Please accept my written testimony today on SB188. I'm touring visiting family across our great state and have no cell service to call in.

As you are aware, the traditional ways we have cared for a person having a Behavioral Health (BH) crisis in our state either sent them to jail or to the hospital, usually in a police car. The hospitals didn't have the expertise or resources to treat their BH problem, so kept them from hurting themselves or someone else, and then discharged them back home most of the time. Jail often provided more intervention than our health care systems. In fact, the Department of Corrections was and remains the number one detox provider in the state. And lastly, the police and state troopers—trained for public safety and to address criminal behavior—were on the front lines in providing immediate assessment, intervention, and transport for what was not usually criminal behavior. Unsurprisingly, this poor system delivered poor results.

The good news is the State of AK, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, and the Mat-Su Health Foundation have invested significant staff, consultant, and financial resources in creating a new response system for Behavioral Health (BH) crises in the Mat-Su community and other communities experiencing growing acute BH crises. The Crisis Now call line and mobile crisis teams are up and running in Mat-Su. The Mat-Su High Utilizer Program (HUMS) is coordinating care for many Crisis Now clients and helping to save millions of dollars in Mat-Su Regional Emergency Department (ED) services annually by preventing excess visits to the ED. Connect Mat-Su is helping to build out a post-crisis referral system for Crisis Now.

We've focused our efforts on Wasilla but have plans to expand across the borough. The Wasilla Police Department is THRILLED with how this is working. Most of the BH providers in our community have coordinated and collaborated to design this new system. We're all in in Mat-Su to make this successful, but the State of AK needs to resource this system appropriately.

We are reaching out to the Governor's staff to educate them on the importance of these services in Mat-Su and all the work that has already happened to change laws in order to stand up this system. Medicaid reimbursement doesn't cover the cost of these 24/7 services right now. We urge you to restore the funds the Governor cut from Crisis Now in the SB188 MH budget. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely, Elizabeth Ripley
President & CEO
Mat-Su Health Foundation

Sent from my iPad



February 22, 2024

Senate Finance Committee
Via email: Senate.Finance.Committee@akleg.gov

Dear Senate Finance Committee Members,

NeighborWorks Alaska urges your support for **Housing Alaskans: A Public-Private Partnership's** legislative appropriation request for \$10M to be leveraged with private donations to accelerate housing development throughout Alaska.

NeighborWorks Alaska is dedicated to improving the quality of life for families and individuals by preserving homes, creating new housing opportunities, and strengthening neighborhoods. As a nonprofit housing provider, we encourage additional investment and support in housing across the state.

Housing Alaskans has proven its impact and is poised to expand its financial support to more housing projects throughout Alaska. Housing Alaskans invested its first legislative appropriation into housing projects that helped bring 80-plus new homes online in Nome, Sitka, Soldotna, Juneau, Wasilla, and Nikolai. The new units are rented or leased to Alaska's workforce, low-income neighbors, those needing supportive housing, seniors, and domestic violence survivors.

These housing projects had been stalled due to cost increases or lack of the final dollars needed in a multi-source capital stack. Housing Alaskans stepped in with "top-off" grants to reignite these projects that otherwise would not have been completed or launched in 2023.

Housing Alaskans is worth investing in. Dozens of similarly stymied housing projects applied for the limited funding in Housing Alaskans' first project solicitation. If the legislature appropriates \$10M in additional funds to Housing Alaskans, hundreds more homes could come online soon.

Housing Alaskans' unique leveraging of private and public funds is a proven driver to help housing developments cross the finish line. Housing Alaskans collaborates with other funders by leveraging public funds and philanthropic contributions, building upon the project reviews done by other funders, and reducing funding restrictions and paperwork to make it easier and faster for developers to get projects moving.

Please vote yes to appropriate \$10M to Housing Alaskans. Thank you very much for your consideration!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jim MacKenzie".

Jim MacKenzie

Executive Director | NeighborWorks Alaska
2515 A Street, Anchorage, AK 99501 | www.nwalaska.org | 907-677-8490



16 February 2024

Senate Finance Committee
State Capitol
Juneau AK, 99801

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Please vote yes to appropriate \$10M to Housing Alaskans. Thank you very much for your consideration!

Respectfully,

Amanda Adams
Co-Owner
Borealis Properties, LLC.



Kara Nelson

Chief Operating Officer

True North Recovery

591 S. Knik Goose Bay Rd.

Wasilla, Alaska 99654

kara@tnrak.org

February 22, 2024

Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Dear Senators,

I am writing to urge you to prioritize and fully fund crisis services in Alaska, particularly in light of recent budget cuts proposed in SB 186 and SB 188. The reduction of crisis service funding from the proposed \$2 million to \$750,000 is concerning and could severely impact our ability to effectively respond to behavioral health crises across the state.

The Crisis Now model, which has proven to be a best practice framework for crisis stabilization services, is essential in diverting individuals in crisis away from unnecessary involvement with law enforcement and emergency medical services. However, without adequate funding, our collective efforts to expand mobile crisis teams and stabilization centers statewide will be significantly hindered.

In Mat-Su, where the need for crisis intervention is acute, data from the 2023 County Drug Rankings highlights alarming statistics, including high rates of excessive drinking, mental health distress, drug overdose deaths, and suicide. The expansion of Mobile Crisis Teams to serve a broader geographic area encompassing 86,000 people demonstrates the pressing need for accessible crisis services in our communities.

True North Recovery's Mobile Crisis Team has been instrumental in responding to various crises, including domestic violence, substance abuse, suicide ideation, and more. However, sustaining and expanding these critical services require adequate funding support. The Mobile Crisis Team's data from the past year and now in year two, underscores the effectiveness of these interventions and the significant impact they have on individuals' lives.

Additionally, partnerships with law enforcement agencies, dispatch teams, and other community organizations have strengthened our crisis response efforts and paved the way for a more integrated system of care. The Crisis Care Network, comprised of various service providers, ensures streamlined access to essential services for individuals utilizing the crisis system of care.

591 S Knik Goose Bay, Wasilla AK, 99654 ** 907.313.1333 ** Fax 907.357.8781



I implore you to restore funding for crisis services as outlined in the Mental Health Operating Budget, specifically:

- Restoring the Start-up Crisis Now Grants to \$1.5 million
- Restoring the Crisis Service Grants to \$500,000

These funds are critical for the expansion and sustainability of mobile crisis teams, crisis stabilization centers, and other essential crisis services statewide. Investing in crisis services not only saves lives but also promotes community well-being and resilience.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I am available to provide any additional information or assistance needed to support the full funding of crisis services in Alaska.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kara Nelson".

Kara Nelson

Chief Operating Officer

True North Recovery

Doniece Gott

From: John Rozzi <john@valleycharities.org>
Sent: Thursday, February 22, 2024 10:17 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: SB188 FY25 Mental Health Budget (GOV): Mobile Crisis Team Important to the health and safety of the MSB

Dear Committee Chair and members,

My name is John Rozzi. I'm the Executive Director for Valley Charities, Inc. Our organization has partnered with several other agencies to prevent homelessness in the Mat-Su Valley. Unfortunately, several residents fall through the cracks and face a hardship that can be difficult to handle. They end up living in tents or their cars. People in those situations can result to unlawful habits to survive. The Mobile Crisis Team supports individuals that are dealing with hardships they find unbearable. As a result of their services they can help prevent further damage to the resident in need or potential victims of their actions.

Currently the Mobile Crisis Team has successfully served 208 clients from 287 MATCOM dispatch calls in the Core Area of Wasilla. The goal is the expansion to serve a larger geographical area that can reach 86,000 people. Unfortunately, Medicaid reimbursement currently doesn't cover the cost of running this 24/7 service. This program needs the support of the original 2 million dollar budget to provide crucial services that assist the Mat-Su and other areas of Alaska.

I'd like to encourage you to reconsider the drastic cuts in funding to the Alaska Mental Health budget. Please put the original funding back in place.

Respectfully,

John Rozzi
Executive Director

Valley Charities, Inc.
400 N Yenlo Street | Office 103 | Wasilla, AK 99654
(p) 907.376.5740 | (e) John.Rozzi@valleycharities.org



VALLEY CHARITIES, INC.
Connecting those who need help with the help they need



Alaska Food Policy Council

PO BOX 173

Homer, AK 99603

907-756-3930

info@alaskafoodpolicycouncil.org

www.akfoodpolicycouncil.org

February 22, 2024

Dear Senate Finance Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on the State's operating, capital, and mental health budgets. I am writing on behalf of the Alaska Food Policy Council (AFPC), which is a nonprofit organization committed to making improvements to Alaska's food system. We have been working since Over 175 agencies and individuals representing federal and state agencies, tribal entities, schools, university programs, farmers, fisheries, and food systems businesses are members of the AFPC.

We are writing to support the following state budget items, all of which will **significantly improve food security and the agricultural industry in Alaska:**

- \$4.5M for direct food purchases for food banks and food pantries across Alaska
- 30 additional eligibility technicians at the Division of Public Assistance
- Increase capacity through additional staffing at the ADNR Division of Agriculture
- Increase capacity through additional staffing at the DEED Child Nutrition Services office
- Last year, the Legislature created the Agriculture Forgivable Loan Program but has not funded this new program. Without funding, ADNR will not draft regulations and this program is not functional. Please consider a small appropriation within the capital budget to the AFLP to help kickstart this newly created program.
- Provide funding for the University of Alaska Agricultural Research Programs and the Cooperative Extension.
- Provide funding for Alaska's Soil & Water Conservation Districts
- Support in-state procurement of Alaska Grown & Alaska Harvested foods through funding Farm-to-Schools and Fish-to-Schools programs.

We appreciate your service, and the opportunity to provide public testimony.

Warmly,

Rachel Lord
Advocacy & Policy Director
Alaska Food Policy Council
www.akfoodpolicycouncil.org

Doniece Gott

From: Melissa Toffolon <[REDACTED]@mat-su.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 22, 2024 10:08 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: SB188 FY25 Mental Health Budget (GOV)

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

I am writing in reference to SB188 FY25 Mental Health Budget (GOV). My name is Melissa Toffolon and I am a resident of Mat-Su and I work as the Mat-Su Crisis Now Coordinator. I am asking that you restore the proposed \$2 million of crisis services funding that has been cut in the Mental Health operating budget. This funding is a really good "bang for the buck," because it funds services like the Mat-Su Mobile Crisis Team (MCT) which provides actual behavioral health intervention to people in crisis. If the MCT did not exist, these individuals would be taken to the emergency department or Mat-Su Pretrial and NOT get the care they need while costing State government money (DOC and Medicaid).

There are many organizations in Mat-Su that are working together to make sure that people served by the MCT then go on to receive the outpatient care they need to make them whole and not go into crisis again.

The MCT started to serve the city of Wasilla in March of this year. They have had 287 calls and their visits have included helping residents with the following:

1. Domestic violence calls
2. People with alcohol and drug crisis
3. Child abuse situations
4. House fires
5. Vehicle repossession where people will be homeless
6. Loss of life calls
7. People with suicidal ideation
8. Calls requiring family mediation
9. Calls involving a disoriented senior
10. Calls involving veterans in crisis
11. Youth who have experienced trauma

The MCT is currently working with the Alaska State Troopers and the Palmer Police Department to provide their services in a larger portion of the borough reaching many thousand more people. Currently, Medicaid reimbursement does not come close to funding these services. The money in the Mental Health budget is crucial to keeping this service up and running and will ultimately save the state many more dollars.

Sincerely,
Melissa Toffolon, MPH, PhD
(907)414-8180

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February 22, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: NAMI Alaska, Inc.
Ann Ringstad, Executive Director

RE: SB 186 (FY25 Operating Budget) – SB 187 (FY25 capital) and SB 188 (FY25 Mental Health Budget)

We would respectfully ask you to please consider including the following items back into the FY25 budgets for mental health supports statewide to include the items with the Alaska Mental Health Trust funds matching funds. Of particular interest to NAMI Alaska are the Crisis Now/988 continuation funds to support mobile integrated health teams in Alaska for communities that already have them in place, and those that are planning on implementing them, especially in rural Alaska.

Fully fund GF/MH Div. of Behavioral Health Start Up Crisis Now Grants for Mobile Crisis/Crisis Stabilization (DOH) +1,000,000 (GF/MH)

These funds are needed to continue our collective efforts to build out mobile crisis teams and stabilization centers statewide. The Crisis Now system is a best practice framework for developing and implementing crisis stabilization services for people experiencing a behavioral health crisis. These services are critical to avoiding the unnecessary use of critical law enforcement and emergency room resources to respond to a person in a behavioral health crisis.

Div. of Public Health Crisis Services Grants (DOH) +\$250,000 (GF/MH)

GF/MH grant dollars are critical to expanding and sustaining this needed system of mobile behavioral health response that can improve outcomes in smaller communities across the state. These grants will support Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) teams that are operating in Alaska. The communities around Alaska that are planning and/or have implemented an MIH response are predominantly rural and off-the-road systems.

We would also draw your attention to the Juneau Mental Court which has proven to be an effective alternative to incarceration for certain individuals in the criminal justice system who are willing to do the work to improve their lives and move on in a positive direction.

Juneau Mental Health Court (ACS) +\$126,100 (GF/MH)

Keeping individuals engaged in community behavioral health treatment is more cost-effective and less restrictive than incarceration and supports public safety. This alternative justice model is working. The Juneau Mental Health Court continues to be a critical component in promoting success and better outcomes for beneficiaries involved with the criminal justice system. If this court is not funded, individuals with mental health disorders involved in the justice system may have an increased chance of recidivating.

Thank you for your consideration of reinstating these funds into the FY25 budgets to help make a difference to Trust beneficiaries.

February 21, 2023

Good Afternoon Members of the Senate Finance Committee

My name is Patrick Reinhart, I am from Homer and I am the Executive Director of the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education. Many of you hosted our council members last week for our annual advocacy trip, which was greatly appreciated by our members and members of the Statewide Independent Living Council .

I would like to discuss a few items of interest to the Council as it stands now with the budget bills. Some of these will sound familiar and some are broader in scope and related to the underfunded portions of the Alaska Mental Health Budget. There are too many for me to highlight in public testimony today, so you will find a longer version of our Council's issues in the Senate Finance "in box" already sent. Below are the items of concern, with the highest priorities in blue:

AK Autism Resource Center (DEED) +\$50,000 (GF/MH) The Alaska Autism Resource Center (AARC) serves the needs of individuals of all ages with Autism Spectrum Disorder, their families, caregivers, and service providers throughout Alaska by providing education, resources, and training. Autism training and education are critical components of Alaska's overall autism priorities and help individuals with autism work towards goals of independence and self-sufficiency. The AARC is managed by DEED through a contract with the Special Education Service Agency. Individuals receiving services in an outpatient setting are more cost-effective and keep the individual in their community.

NOTE: The Trust's recommended is \$50,000 GF/MH for the program is not included in the Governor's amended budget.

Transit Match Funding (DOT&PF) +\$1,000,000 (GF) Prior to FY18, the State put in GF capital dollars to help transit providers with their local match requirements for various Federal transit program grants for operational support and capital equipment and facility purchases. This State investment helped leverage more than three times as much in Federal funds. There are currently significant Federal investments in community and public transit systems nationwide, and Alaska can access these Federal funds if they can come up with the local match. Applicants must provide matching funds in the amount of 10%, 20% and sometimes 50%, depending on the program. To ensure that our local transit providers can access all the new Federal funding for community transportation, state funds are needed.

Note: This item is not in the capital budget.

Home Modifications and Upgrades (DOH) +\$575,000 (GF/MH) The Home Modifications and Upgrades to Retain Housing project provides housing modifications to persons experiencing a disability, allowing them to remain in their homes and reducing the potential cost of providing assisted living home care or institutional placement. Typical kinds of assistance provided are accessibility modifications or additions (e.g., widen doorways, remodel bathrooms and/or kitchens, install entrance ramps) and related equipment. All funds will be awarded to qualified organizations through a statewide competitive grant process through the DOH, Division of Finance, and Management Services. If funds are cut, fewer resources will be available to vulnerable Alaskans needing home modifications so they can remain in their own homes.

NOTE: Funding for this program in the amended budget is -\$575,000 less than recommended by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority. Also, this is not the Medicaid funded Environmental Mod program available for persons on waivers, which as we discussed is significantly too low at \$18,500. This funding is more for Alaskans who are not on waivers.

Special Needs Housing Grant (AHFC) -\$1,750,000 (GF/MH) - This capital project funds, through competitive grants, housing programs for both the long and short-term housing needs of Alaska's special needs populations. AHFC administers the funds by issuing grants and contracts for project-based housing vouchers, services, and/or construction costs associated with permanent supportive housing. Permanent supportive housing provides housing with services for people who are homeless and have one or more disabling or chronic conditions and targets Trust beneficiaries who are considered high utilizers of both Medicaid and emergency services.

NOTE: The Trust's recommendation is \$1.75 million GF/MH, which supports Trust and AHFC funding for the program. The Governor's amended budget does not include any of the recommended GF/MH.

GCDSE Joint Staffing (DOH) +\$50,000 (GF/MH) The Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education (GCDSE or the Council) was created to meet Alaska's diverse needs to support people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). The Council uses planning, capacity building, systems change, and advocacy to create change for people with disabilities. Federal regulations require a council make-up to include 50% of council members to be people with disabilities. Due to the disabilities experienced by the council members, in-person meetings are necessary to engage in the work to be done at the full board meetings. Funding for GCDSE is shared between, general funds, MHTAAR, and GF/MH. If GF/MH funding is reduced, GCDSE will need to cut its support for programmatic efforts that support Trust beneficiaries experiencing IDD and their families and caregivers.

NOTE: The Trust's recommended is \$50,000 GF/MH for the program is not included in the Governor's amended budget. The amended budget does include \$184,500 in MHTAAR (Trust) funds for GCDSE staffing.

Centralized Accommodation Fund (DOA) +\$100,000 (GF/MH) for State employees with disabilities. Establishing a CAF in state government was recommended by the 2022 Alaska Work Matters Task Force which was co-led by the DOLWD Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Governor's Council

NOTE: The Trust's recommended is \$100,000 GF/MH for the program is not included in the Governor's amended budget. However, the administration is considering a long term financing mechanism for a CAF, like a small charge to each state department, agency and unit that replenishes the fund as needed. That is the best scenario long term and we appreciate the administration's consideration for this financing solution

Div. of Behavioral Health Start Up Crisis Now Grants for Mobile Crisis/Crisis Stabilization (DOH) +\$1,000,000 (GF/MH) The Crisis Now system is a best practice framework for developing and implementing crisis stabilization services for people experiencing a behavioral health crisis. These services are critical to avoiding the unnecessary use of critical law enforcement and emergency room resources to respond to a person in a behavioral health crisis. The State funds will leverage Alaska Mental Health Trust investments and support implementation of crisis stabilization and mobile crisis teams (behavioral health professional and peer support/or similar professional makeup) in communities working to improve their crisis response services. Grant funds will be directed towards currently operating, or new services for planning,

startup/launch, operating and facility/technology needs. Without this fully funded GF/MH increment, collective efforts to build out mobile crisis teams and stabilization centers statewide will be limited in scope and progress.

NOTE: The amount for these grants in the amended budget is -\$1,000,000 less than recommended by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

Div. of Public Health Crisis Services Grants (DOH) +\$250,000 (GF/MH) These grants will support Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) teams that are operating in Alaska. MIH teams consist of a paramedic/EMT and a behavioral health professional with the task of responding to beneficiaries in the community. The intent of the teams is to meet people where they are, assess and stabilize in the community, and to them make the referral for the next steps of care. The communities around Alaska that are planning and/or have implemented an MIH response are predominantly rural and off-the-road systems. Resources for operationalizing these rural-based services are limited, and GF/MH grant dollars are critical to expanding and sustaining this needed system of mobile behavioral health response that can improve outcomes in smaller communities across the state.

NOTE: The amount for these grants in the amended budget is -\$250,000 less than recommended by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

Homeless Assistance Program (AHFC) +\$2,850,000 (GF/MH) This capital project funds grants to homeless shelters and other community organizations that provide homeless preventions services, emergency rental and utility assistance, rapid rehousing and more to Alaskans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These programs work on the continuum of care to assist families in obtaining or retaining safe and stable housing and work with nonprofit partners to create sustainable, supportive housing over time. If funding is reduced, fewer resources will be available in the future to vulnerable Alaskans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

NOTE: The Trust's recommendation is \$2.85 million GF/MH, which supports Trust and AHFC funding for the program. The Governor's amended budget does not include any of the recommended GF/MH.

Comprehensive Program Planning Coordinator (DOH) +\$75,000 (GF/MH) The DOH is required by AS 47.30.660 to develop, implement, and monitor Alaska's Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Program 5-year plan, which outlines the priorities and infrastructure needed for the next five years to inform the DOH and DFCS program, planning, and funding decisions. The Trust coordinates with the departments in this effort. This position in DOH works collaboratively with DOH, DFCS and the Trust to facilitate, manage, and coordinate resources necessary to ensure the ongoing implementation, evaluation, and monitoring of the Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Program. This position also supports the Department's planning, facilitation, and updates of the plan.

NOTE: The Trust's recommended is \$75,000 GF/MH for this position is not included in the Governor's amended budget. The amended budget does include \$75,000 in MHTAAR (Trust) funds for this position.

Long Term Care Ombudsman (DOR) +\$133,500 (GF/MH) The Alaska Long Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) Office's staff of six investigates complaints related to long term care facilities, makes unannounced visits to Skilled Nursing Facilities and Assisted Living Homes, educates Seniors about their

rights, and advocates on behalf of seniors in Alaska. Currently, there are more than 600 Assisted Living Homes, and more than 20 Skilled Nursing Facilities in Alaska. Since 2019, the Office has seen an increase in the number of large (68-120 bed) Assisted Living Homes and the development of two new Skilled Nursing Facilities. These GF/MH funds would support an additional Assistant Ombudsman position, which travels for planned and unannounced site visits, as well as travel costs for the necessary site visits. Without an additional staff person, the Office anticipates 120 fewer visits to Long-Term Care facilities and a reduction in cases that address, investigate, and resolve complaints from seniors in LTC settings.

NOTE: The Trust's recommended is \$133,500 GF/MH for the program is not included in the Governor's amended budget.

Juneau Mental Health Court (ACS) +\$126,100 (GF/MH) The Juneau Mental Health Court continues to be a critical component in promoting success and better outcomes for beneficiaries involved with the criminal justice system. The therapeutic model is an alternative justice model in which a collaborative team oversees and closely monitors participants who choose the treatment program in lieu of incarceration for some felony and misdemeanor offenses. If this court is not funded, individuals with mental health disorders involved in the justice system may have an increased chance of recidivating. Keeping individuals engaged in community behavioral health treatment is more cost-effective and less restrictive than incarceration, and supports public safety.

NOTE: The Trust's recommended is \$121,6000 GF/MH for the program is not included in the Governor's amended budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director
Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education



HOPE

Helping Ourselves Prevent Emergencies

PO Box 145, Craig, AK 99921

907-826-2581

hopeprevention@aptalaska.net

Helping Ourselves Prevent Emergencies (HOPE)- Craig, Alaska

Senate Finance Committee

RE: Department of Public Safety Budget- CDVSA Grants

Good afternoon, Chairs Stedman, Olson, Hoffman, and Committee members,

My name is Tiffany Mills, and I am the Executive Director for Helping Ourselves Prevent Emergencies (HOPE) on Prince of Wales Island. We offer domestic violence/sexual assault victim advocacy, food, homeless and legal assistance, transportation, and other services to those in need. I deeply appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony to the Committee. I am writing to offer support for an increase to CDVSA's grants line in the Department of Public Safety's budget. I thank the Committee for recognizing victim services as an essential element of crime response; however, the current budget would potentially result in a 20% decrease in our agency's funding.

A likely 20% shortfall in our agency's CDVSA grant funding would prevent HOPE from being able to provide food and household items to the victims who come to our agency for assistance. We may also be forced to take health insurance benefits away from staff.

The cost of everything in rural Alaska is higher exponentially higher than it has been over the last few years, and prices are continuing to increase. For example, a jar of mayonnaise is now \$15, almost double the cost from 2019. One trip to the grocery store for a participant who comes to us for support usually costs about \$750-\$850 for a family of three to four people for around ten days' worth of food.

We are also working with staffing shortages. Because our agency just began offering health insurance to full-time employees in 2022 to compete with other employers on the Island, we are being very conservative in our hiring practices. Our staff insurance package costs us over \$4,200/month, and we may be forced to cut that benefit to employees, which would certainly cause us to lose staff members, because other businesses/agencies in our rural area do provide at least the level of benefits offered by HOPE at this time.

We hope you can find more available funds to support CDVSA's grants line in the budget so that we can continue to assist those in need.

Respectfully,

Tiffany Mills
HOPE Executive Director

Haugstad Advocacy & Litigation Office, LLC

12350 Industry Way, Suite 203,
Anchorage, AK 99515

(907) 202-8888
www.haloak.com

February 21, 2024

Senate Finance Committee
c/o: Senate.Finance.Committee@akleg.gov

Dear Committee Members,

This letter is sent to state my support for the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA) program through Abused Women's Aid in Crisis (AWAIC).

AWAIC is the only domestic violence emergency shelter in Anchorage. It provides a 67-bed emergency shelter, 24/7 crisis line, and other core programs. It also provides essential services to those not residing in our shelter including case management, support, and groups, and has two transitional housing programs. These services are funded through local, state, and federal grants.

I understand that CDVSA will be losing funding this year. I want to encourage you to maintain funding for AWAIC despite the budget decreases. AWAIC shelter providers much needed services to the community. CDVSA funding decreases will have direct impacts on AWAICs ability to serve Alaska residents.

Thank you for your hard work and consideration.

Sincerely,



Bryan D. Haugstad

Doniece Gott

From: Sarah-Kathryn Bryan <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, February 22, 2024 12:44 PM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: AWAIC Depends on CDVSA Funding

Good afternoon,

Thank you for serving the State of Alaska. I'm writing to encourage the Senate Finance Committee to address the severe funding cut to the Alaska Department of Public Safety's Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA) in the Governor's proposed budget.

As a member of the Board of Abused Women's Aid in Crisis (AWAIC) and a former domestic violence prosecutor, I know that a cut to CDVSA funding immediately harms a coalition of service providers including AWAIC. This coalition frequently works closely with law enforcement. When I prosecuted domestic violence on behalf of the Municipality of Anchorage, I relied heavily on AWAIC's services to ensure the safety of critical victim-witnesses. Without the safe shelter, counseling, and other assistance that AWAIC provides to domestic violence victims, law enforcement will have even greater difficulty prosecuting violent offenders. The funding cut to CDVSA harms law enforcement and our state's public safety, as well as our state's most vulnerable crime victims.

The current funding cut in the Governor's proposed budget to CDVSA will impose significant hardship on AWAIC's clients. AWAIC will have to eliminate its legal advocacy program, which among other things has allowed a legal advocate to have a post in the Boney Courthouse where victims obtain Domestic Violence Protective Orders. AWAIC will have to make any vacant positions in the shelter redundant, and may have to reduce its shelter census by more than 30%.

I sincerely appreciate everything you do to serve our state. Please prioritize restoring funding to CDVSA.

Respectfully,

Sarah Kathryn Bryan
[REDACTED]

[https://urldefense.com/v3/__http://www.Linkedin.com/in/sarahkathrynbryan__;!!LdQKC6s!O4vg0Yuw4rSohWz1o4Cvh0MVNbmtzFB8VWalGguDrZxkOeeFg0j32xHSckvYlaGVnAFcoTggqVXpK0oX2fEPbhiYNeQ\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/__http://www.Linkedin.com/in/sarahkathrynbryan__;!!LdQKC6s!O4vg0Yuw4rSohWz1o4Cvh0MVNbmtzFB8VWalGguDrZxkOeeFg0j32xHSckvYlaGVnAFcoTggqVXpK0oX2fEPbhiYNeQ$)

Doniece Gott

From: Virginia Walsh <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Wednesday, February 21, 2024 7:10 PM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Impending budget cuts

Good afternoon Co-chair Senator Hoffman, Co-chair Senator Olson, Senator Wilson, Senator Merrick, Senator Stedman, Senator Bishop, and Senator Kiehl,

I am the program coordinator at Arctic Women in Crisis(AWIC). Tonight a winter storm is whipping through the streets of Utqiagvik while we're scrambling to complete travel requests for a family in the one of the outlying villages with multiple children displaced due to domestic violence; providing assistance to the North Slope Borough Police Department to transport a mother and daughter to Stevie's Place in Fairbanks; prepare food boxes for community residents waiting for their food stamp allocation; and assist an Elder complete paperwork, so she can obtain a protective order and find safety.

AWIC is the only shelter on the North Slope, and up until now, we've been incredibly fortunate to receive enough funding to help the victims of sexual assault and domestic violence who desperately need our services. Domestic violence and sexual assault are critical social problems that affect not just abuse survivors and their children but our entire North Slope communities. AWIC offers sanctuary and targeted support to survivors in ways that are proven to be beneficial well beyond our open doors. We don't just provide safe shelter; we offer key strategic services to help our participants heal, become independent, and thrive.

- **Crisis hotline**-- 24/7 hotline that survivors can use in an emergency or for general counseling, which provides them with essential information and guides them in taking steps to get support.
- **Safe shelter for domestic violence and sexually assault survivors**-- we offer a physically safe space where victims of violence and their children can escape abuse.
- **Safety planning**--emergency shelter services help survivors complete safety plans which can prevent further violence from occurring when they are outside the shelter.
- **Counseling services**--abuse survivors can get counseling for themselves and their children to help them process trauma, heal, and move forward.
- **Legal advocacy**-- AWIC assists participants access legal services, and navigate the criminal justice system, including filing for Protective Orders.

If our shelter sustains a 10-20% cut to our budget, we would have to reduce our service provision, and we could not provide essential services including emergency transportation and safe housing for the number of participants we currently serve--our participants are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless. AWIC also facilitates prevention and outreach programs to the North Slope Borough School District. We probably could not afford to keep our advocate who provides outreach and teaches students about healthy relationships: how to maintain them, and how to avoid dating violence. That's essential because so many of our participants tell us they didn't really understand they were experiencing domestic violence or learn the tools to identify the unhealthy parts of their relationships.

I am grateful that you allowed me to write to you and ask for your continued support in funding our Alaskan domestic violence and sexual assault shelters. Thank you.

Quyanaqpak,

Ginny Walsh, LCSW-C

(she, her)

AWIC Program Coordinator

NSB Department of Health and Social Services, Arctic Women in Crisis

P.O. Box 69

Utqiagvik, AK 99723 (907) 852-0261

Fax: (907) 852-2474



Resource: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teendatingviolence/fastfact.html>

February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

Please Remember Mahsa Amini !

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Doniece Gott

From: Mel Beadle [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 22, 2024 7:46 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: On DV Program Budget Cuts

Good morning,

My name is Mel Beadle, I'm the shelter supervisor at SAFV in Sitka. I'm writing to express my truly visceral fear for all who will bear the brunt of the proposed 20% cut in funding for DV programs. This cut will significantly deplete our budget for on-call and relief staff, meaning that supervisors like me across the state will be stretched beyond capacity with no end in sight.

A cut like this would put our shelter into a state of crisis, I know this because we have already experienced what it means to not have relief staff. I was called to cover shifts last minute, working 70-80 hours a week, including sleeping at the shelter. Sleep deprivation, lack of space and free time, and constant secondary trauma are the quickest ways to burnout. In my first months as a supervisor, that is where I was headed.

Now, with a team of relief staff, I am able to focus on intentional client services and build community partnerships. I've built relationships with local substance use programs, the police and soon the DAs office, not to mention clinicians and social workers, and even doctors. I am offering more oversight and support to advocates. I am supporting strong case management for each client. These are things that our organization would not be able to do if I was filling shifts for advocates every week. And the people who would suffer most, would be those that we serve.

I love the work that we do at SAFV because I see how it is working. I see people getting sober and getting back on their feet after life has literally abused and torn them apart. I want to be part of this work for a long time and I have so many dreams of how we can make our work better. Please give me the opportunity to see those dreams through. Without relief staff, I am not okay. If I am not okay, my staff is not okay, and if we are not okay, our clients are the ones who suffer. They deserve our best.

Voting for this budget cut will completely destabilize DV shelters across the state. Alaska's DV/SA survivors deserve more.

Thank you for taking time to read this and for considering the profound impact of this decision on the most vulnerable in our communities.

All my best,
Mel

Mel Beadle (she/her)
Shelter Supervisor
Sitkans Against Family Violence (SAFV)
(907) 747-3470 | mbeadle@safv.org
Visit our [website](#) | Like us on [Facebook](#)



My name is Eileen Arnold and I live in Bethel. I'm the Director of the Tundra Women's Coalition.

I'd like to start by thanking the committee members for listening today. I'm testifying for the CDVSA budget in the Department of Public Safety—specifically for services to victims.

The budget has a \$4 million dollar deficit which may result in a 20% loss to programs like mine. This loss is not sustainable. It's equivalent to three FT staff.

To let three FT staff go we'd reduce our shelter census from 43 to 33 daily capacity. This almost exclusively impacts Alaska Native people as 99% of the people who use our services are Alaska Native. It would also mean people can't stay as long as they need. Adults with developmental disabilities and mental health disorders who have more complicated needs will suffer most from shortened stays.

TWC is an integral part of the justice response in the Delta-sometimes the only part available to survivors. People in my region sometimes don't get justice or safety from the other funded partners on the Multi-Disciplinary team-troopers are not always available; DAs sometimes screen out cases. Survivors can always access TWC even though we are given the least number of resources from the State. Please don't take away our availability.

Maybe some of you saw the ADN article with the headline "Washington state man sentenced to 20 years for enticing Bethel girl." What wasn't mentioned in that article is that caregiver came to staff at TWC to disclose. It was our staff who brought it to troopers. People in our region trust that TWC is the place they can come to if they don't know what to do or how to get help. We use our relationships with law enforcement and department of law to give people access they wouldn't typically have so that they can pursue both justice and safety.

I recognize and appreciate how hard the work of putting together a budget is. I do that every year as well and sometimes it's excruciating, having to consider a lot of equally important things. Thank you for your work in doing that and please find a way to put the \$4 million back into CDVSA's budget.

Doniece Gott

From: Eileen Arnold [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 22, 2024 9:58 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Answers from Eileen Arnold

I understand a question about if the numbers have risen came to me.

Questions like those are never easy because there's a lot of variables like what's going on in the country (like COVID) and what's going on with the framework of support in our region (like if there are open positions in the DA or troopers).

Very simply I can say our numbers rose in terms of shelter nights and usage of the multi-disciplinary team for both adults and children. Some of that is better knowledge of our systems and people using them before because of the trust we built. I don't necessarily think there's been a change in violence out there.

--

Eileen Arnold
She, Her, Hers
Executive Director
Tundra Women's Coalition
[REDACTED]



NOTICE-

Tundra Women's Coalition, Box 2029, Bethel, AK (907)543-3444

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Doniece Gott

From: Suzi P [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, February 21, 2024 12:03 PM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Operating Budget - Public testimony for AWAIC
Importance: High

Dear Senate Finance Committee Members,

I am writing to you on behalf of Abused Women's Aid In Crisis (AWAIC) located in Anchorage. AWAIC is the only emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence in our community. AWAIC has 67 emergency shelter beds, provides nonresidential services, and legal advocacy through our grant from the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA).

The loss of funding to CDVSA of \$4 million will cause an approximate 20% cut in AWAIC's emergency shelter budget. A cut this deep will lead to making vacant positions redundant, possibly eliminate our legal advocacy program, reduce our census in shelter from 67 emergency beds to 45, and create a waitlist for those seeking nonresidential services.

Last fiscal year AWAIC served 482 adults and children in our emergency shelter, 281 through our legal advocacy program, and 233 nonresidential participants. A cut to AWAIC's budget through CDVSA will result in the shelter and nonresidential participants being served reduced and the possible elimination of the legal advocacy program.

Just replacing these funds will not do more than flat fund AWAIC once again. CDVSA grants for domestic violence and sexual assault agencies have been flat funded for almost eight years with small increments for domestic violence and sexual assault programs for utilities and food being provided based on ARPA and CARES Act money. These increments will stop with the loss of ARPA and CARES Act funding to the state.

My request to you is to put the \$4 million dollars into CDVSA's base to provide more stability for victim's futures. This is just to maintain flat funding. It would be even more supportive to victims and survivors for you to acknowledge the life-saving work that shelters and sexual assault agencies provide and increase overall funding for CDVSA.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at suzi_p@awiac.org or phone at [REDACTED].

Thank you for your consideration.

Suzi Pearson | Executive Director

Abused Women's Aid In Crisis, Inc.

907-743-5726 (office) | 907-272-0100 (crisis)

100 W 13th Avenue | Anchorage, AK 99501



Dena'inaq ɛtneŋ'aq' gheshtnu ch'q'u yeshdu. (Dena'ina)

I live and work on Dena'ina land. (English)



February 21, 2024

Senate Finance Committee

Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street Rm 3
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Dear Senators Bishop & Stedman,

Thank you for providing the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA) funding line item in the DPS Budget.

My name is Mandy Cole, the Executive Director for AWARE. AWARE is a DV/SA program in Juneau, funded in part by the CDVSA.

As I understand the budget, the decreased funding proposed for programs under CDVSA would likely result in a devastating 20% reduction in AWARE's FY25 budget. This would likely mean we will be unable to fund 24/hr coverage in our emergency safe shelter.

Maintaining an emergency shelter is expensive in terms of personnel costs. Cutting personnel will translate to less available hours/beds for those fleeing domestic violence. Our shelter serves a disproportionate number of Alaskans experiencing extreme poverty, abuse, and often behavioral health crises. These are the people who need the most support, and if we lose funding, these are the people who will feel the pain of a reduction in services. They are also the people who are least likely to be able to testify in front of you, and they put their trust in me, and our organization, to advocate on their behalf.

Please consider increasing the funding for CDVSA in the DPS budget. Agencies such as AWARE are an integral part of our state's safety net, and we want to do the work for Alaskans.

Kindly,

Mandy Cole

Executive Director, AWARE

Doniece Gott

From: Heather Garland <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, February 22, 2024 9:44 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: STAR Alaska Budget Testimony

I am currently a volunteer for the STAR Alaska crisis line and wish to share my thoughts on the current budget risks posed to this amazing organization. I have been a volunteer for the past three years.

The services provided by STAR are crucial to victims and survivors of sexual assault and their families and loved ones. We provide resources, educate, and provide a unique level of support that cannot be received anywhere else. I have walked callers through breathing exercises as they relive horrific memories in the middle of the night, talked them through the stress of testifying in court, or listened as they talked about their feelings in being unable to support their loved ones in crisis. This would not be possible without the funding that supports STAR. The team at STAR works endlessly to support not only their clients but their volunteers, making themselves available when we have a rough shift or helping us to navigate sensitive issues. They work tirelessly to ensure an advocate is available when that dreaded call comes in that an advocate is needed to go to the MDC for a sexual assault exam.

I have volunteered with other sexual assault hotlines over the years in other states, and it is clear to me that the resources STAR provides to Alaskans are even more critical and cannot have its funding put at risk.

Thank you,
Heather Garland
STAR Alaska Volunteer since May 2021

Written Testimony on Alaska State Budget

Michael L. Jones
Homer Resident
February 22, 2024

Written Testimony on Alaska State Budget

From what I've seen of the budget process we are on track to (yet again) take away the PFD to fund special interests. Reducing the PFD is the most regressive tax option available...it hurts the lowest income people the most.

Some of the special interests seeking a benefit from government are hidden in the bills supporting Renewable Portfolio Standards, Clean Energy Standards, and Community Energy Facilities. In each case, these special interests are asking for a handout whether it be a guaranteed revenue stream or a direct subsidy through mandates. State Government should not be involved in such things when EXISTING MARKET BASED MECHANISMS ALREADY PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY TO FACILITATE implementation of these pet projects.

One market mechanism would be to stop funding special interests and pay a FULL PFD.

This way, low-income households would get the funding they need, and upper income households could choose to use their PFD to fund the special interests they are passionate about. Let the special interests COMPETE for funding from PFD recipients through PICK, CLICK, GIVE or some other market-based subscription mechanism to fund their pet projects.

If the community really wants to fund a project, they can support it with their PFD dollars.

On another note...are we really going to fail to learn from the past and create a defined benefits program for public workers?

The retention arguments are compelling neither as to their effectiveness nor their need.

Are we really going to provide government employees with an out of market benefit and slap the private sector in the face? REALLY?

Let's look at our current indebtedness from the past venture in defined benefits and learn from it.

Let's look at California which is forecasting to have a \$73 billion budget deficit and observe what big government looks like.

Let's learn and make good choices. Thank you.

Doniece Gott

From: Tom Boutin [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 08, 2024 5:08 PM
To: House Finance; Senate Finance Committee
Cc: Rep. Cathy Tilton; Sen. Gary Stevens
Subject: Court System presentation

Good evening,

I understand that the court systems address to the Legislature may have included a plea for a new courthouse to be constructed in Palmer. I don't know anything about that and it may well be needed. However, no new state project should be financed with debt – not general obligation and not lease debt. When I look at the known economic projects and developments on the horizon here in Alaska I see nothing that recommends we not pay for everything today with cash. Using something today and leaving the payment for future Alaskans to make from the future economy should not be approved by the Legislature. If we need something we must find a way to pay for it today as part of current spending. I sure hope you agree.

Thanks for your time. Thanks for all the hard work you do for Alaskans.

Tom Boutin
Juneau

Doniece Gott

From: Tom Boutin <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, February 09, 2024 1:10 PM
To: House Finance; Senate Finance Committee
Cc: Rep. Cathy Tilton; Sen. Gary Stevens
Subject: GO and all general fund debt

Good afternoon,

Reading the Juneau Empire story about potential long-term general fund debt prompts me to email that there is, in my view, nothing in the state financial outlook to recommend long-term general fund debt whether the debt is general obligation debt, lease debt or some other financing instrument that depends upon future general fund revenues for debt service. The Legislature is tasked with balancing a budget and determining spending priorities, but committing future revenues, even when approved by voters, should not be part of any fiscal decision or outcome. If the state needs something then please pay for it from current revenues. In a very real way selling general fund debt is an even worse financial decision than deficit spending.

A general obligation authorization bill in an election year virtually guarantees a huge spending package that balances rural and urban spending and boosts spending in every region. I do think that there may be an opportunity to finance rail-belt utility improvements by leveraging or pledging the amount due the state general fund by the Interior Gas Utility. I think that could be appropriate given the extraordinary circumstances surrounding Cook Inlet gas supplies.

The state has a bleak economic outlook no matter what the credit rating agencies may be led to believe. Oil production has dropped 80 percent from its peak and we have found nothing to replace that economic activity even though our population has doubled since then. Henry Hub natural gas is below \$2, and large investment banks have soured on arctic resource development – including petroleum. We have 92,000 Alaskans on SNAP even as we have employers (especially public employers it seems) wringing their hands over not being able to fill job vacancies. Workers who might approve a GO debt authorization on election day can and will leave the state if the economic circumstances appear to be better elsewhere. I suspect we are lagging all other states in economic progress right now.

Thank you for your time.

Tom Boutin
Juneau