



March 17, 2025

Dear House Judiciary Committee,

The Alaska Governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking has consistently failed to operate with transparency, accuracy, or necessity. For over three years, we have been systematically denied access to its public meetings, despite legal requirements for open participation.

The Council has not met since July 12, 2024, and its Public Awareness Subcommittee has not convened since August 9, 2024. Yet, Alaska's ability to combat sex trafficking has remained unchanged, proving the Council is unnecessary.

When it was active, the Council regularly misrepresented research and presented debunked statistics as fact. Given its lack of transparency, misinformation, and complete inactivity, the Council serves no meaningful purpose and choosing to fund this **inflated and ineffective Council** is a waste of finite state resources.

Our first attempt to attend a meeting was on October 11, 2022, when Tara Burns and Amber Nickerson were left waiting in the Microsoft Teams "waiting room" indefinitely. We were still denied entry when we attempted to call in using the listed phone number and extension.

The following day, October 12, 2022, Tara reached out to Brenda Stanfill, then a Council director, who apologized and assured me that she would personally provide a link for the next meeting. That same day, I also submitted a public records request, which was reportedly forwarded to Katie TePas. Those records were never received.

From that point forward, a clear pattern emerged over two years:

- On December 19, 2022, it was discovered that the Council had already held one or two meetings without notifying me, despite Ms. Stanfill's promise. When emailed about attending the December 20, 2022 meeting, it was suddenly canceled at the last minute.
- We filed Ombudsman Complaint #2022-11-1930, and the Ombudsman's office advised us to coordinate with Katie TePas to gain access. However, each time we notified her of our intent to attend, the meeting was either canceled or rescheduled at the last minute without proper notice.
- In November or December 2023, Tara and Amber spent 30 minutes attempting to access a meeting through Microsoft Teams and the call-in number but were never admitted.
- A December 14, 2023, Council meeting was suddenly pre-scheduled for December 13, 2023, preventing public participation.
- Ombudsman Complaints #2023-11-1930 and #2023-11-2204 were filed, and again, the Ombudsman's office advised us to \*\*continue coordinating with Ms. TePas.
- December 2023, I changed my Microsoft Teams display name from "Terra Burns" to "Tara in Alaska" and was finally admitted to a meeting for the first time.

Despite legal requirements for public access, the Alaska Governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking continued to operate in secrecy, systematically preventing the public from observing its meetings. This is not a past issue; it remains unresolved.

This ongoing lack of transparency raises a critical question: Why is a state council on human and sex trafficking going to such lengths to avoid public oversight, particularly from a sex trafficking survivor and subject matter expert?

The Council's refusal to hold open meetings is only one part of a larger issue. Even when the Council was active, it was misleading legislators and the public with debunked statistics and misrepresented research.

- During testimony before the legislature, Representative Sarah Vance, a Council member, falsely claimed that "the average life expectancy of a sex worker after entering prostitution is seven years." This statistic has been thoroughly debunked. PolitiFact disproved it in 2015 and 2019, citing a 2004 study in the *Journal of Epidemiology* that followed nearly 2,000 sex workers over 33 years and found an 8% mortality rate, nowhere near the claim made by Vance.
- Page 15 of its 2022 report, the Council cites the study "***Do John Schools Really Decrease Recidivism?***" claiming John Schools reduce recidivism. In reality, the study found the opposite, that John Schools do not reduce recidivism.

- At the **2024 Alaska Data Summit** on March 1, 2024 at the Loussac Library, Council member and Assistant Attorney General Chris Darnell once again misrepresented this study, falsely claiming that John Schools are effective, despite research showing they are not.

The Alaska Governor's Council on Human and Sex Trafficking not only fails in its duty to provide transparency but it demonstrates it is not necessary. Its inactivity for over eight months has had no measurable impact on the state's ability to address sex trafficking. When the Council was active, it manipulated misinformation to exaggerate victim numbers, employing vague definitions, restricting public access, and neglecting to engage with credible evidence.

There is no justification for funding a council that refuses transparency and deceives policymakers. Alaska's ability to combat sex trafficking has remained unchanged despite the Council's inactivity, and proves its irrelevance. If the Council were necessary, its absence would have had a noticeable impact, yet nothing has changed.

Alaska deserves evidence-based solutions and accountability, not a dysfunctional Council operating in secrecy.

Please vote **NO** on HB118.

Amber Nickerson  
Maxine Doogan  
Tara Burns  
Kat McElroy