

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
**SENATE STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

February 28, 2002  
3:40 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Gene Therriault, Chair  
Senator Randy Phillips, Vice Chair  
Senator Ben Stevens  
Senator Bettye Davis

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Rick Halford

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 26  
Relating to Avalanche Awareness Month.  
MOVED SCR 26 OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 297  
"An Act moving employees of the Alaska mental health trust land unit of the Department of Natural Resources from the partially exempt service to the exempt service."  
MOVED SB 297 OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

SCR 26 - No previous action to record.

SB 297 - No previous action to record.

**WITNESS REGISTER**

Jerry Burnett  
Staff to Senator Lyda Green  
Alaska State Capitol, Room 125  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced SCR 26

Tim Lampkin  
Staff to Senator Gary Wilken  
Alaska State Capitol, Room 514  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced SB 297

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

**TAPE 02-12, SIDE A**

**CHAIRMAN GENE THERRIAULT** called the Senate State Affairs Committee meeting to order at 3:40 p.m. Present were Senators Davis, Stevens, Phillips and Chairman Therriault.

The first order of business was SCR 26.

#SCR 26

**SCR 26-AVALANCHE AWARENESS MONTH**

JERRY BURNETT, Staff to Senator Lyda Green, testified that SCR 26 proclaims November 2002 as avalanche awareness month. Each year Alaskans lose their lives as a result of avalanches and 1999 was one of the worst when 14 people died. Avalanches are difficult to predict and prevent so education on their dangers as well as the conditions under which they are likely to occur can save lives.

The proclamation will raise public awareness of the hazards associated with avalanches and the opportunities to participate in avalanche safety training at the beginning of the winter recreation season. Hopefully, the increased knowledge will result in lives being saved.

The need for the proclamation was brought to light by the Backcountry Awareness Response Team (BAART), which is an organization formed by family members of avalanche victims who are dedicated to preventing future avalanche deaths. The team is comprised of trained volunteers who provide search and rescue services following slides and who educate the public on avalanche safety.

There was no further testimony.

CHAIRMAN THERRIAULT clarified this only applies to the year 2002; it is not permanent.

He noted the zero fiscal note. There was no committee substitute and no amendments were proposed.

He asked for the will of the committee.

SENATOR PHILLIPS made a motion to move SCR 26 and attached fiscal note from committee with individual recommendations.

There being no objection, SCR 26 moved from committee.  
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#SB 297

**SB 297-MENTAL HEALTH TRUST LAND UNIT EMPLOYEES**

TIM LAMPKIN, Staff to Senator Gary Wilken, read the following sponsor statement into the record:

Senate Bill 297 was introduced at the request of the Mental Health Trust Authority. It places employees of the Mental Health Trust Authority lands unit into exempt service.

The Mental Health Trust Land Unit is located in the Department of Natural Resources. Its sole purpose is to manage Alaska Mental Health Trust land on behalf of the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority. Its operating costs are funded entirely by income generated from the cash and land assets of the Trust, not by general funds.

The unit maintains a core operating staff of nine. This legislation will provide the MHTA with the means of retaining trained staff that are being solicited by, and relocating to, other agencies offering better compensation packages not afforded by the current "partially exempt" status of MHTA lands unit employees. Additionally, it will align the unit with the management framework of the trust authority staff, which was converted to fully exempt status for similar reasons last year.

Please support this legislation and thereby allow the AMHTA to more efficiently manage their personnel structure, to reward performance, and establish a long-term fix for their efforts to recruit, train, and retain key staff.

MR. LAMPKIN asked that representatives from the MHTA to answer questions via teleconference but they were not online.

There was no further testimony.

CHAIRMAN THERRIault said he had spoken with Jeff Jesse

from the MHTA earlier in the week.

He noted the zero fiscal note. There was no prepared committee substitute and no amendments were offered.

He asked for the will of the committee.

SENATOR PHILLIPS made a motion to move SB 297 and attached fiscal note from committee with individual recommendations.

There being no objection, SB 297 moved from committee.

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