

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES  
STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 26, 2004  
3:07 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Peggy Wilson, Chair  
Representative Carl Gatto, Vice Chair  
Representative John Coghill  
Representative Paul Seaton  
Representative Kelly Wolf  
Representative Sharon Cissna

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Mary Kapsner

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 31  
Proclaiming March 2004 as Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness  
Month.

- MOVED CSHCR 31(HES) OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HCR 31

SHORT TITLE: TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS MONTH

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) MCGUIRE

02/16/04	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/16/04	(H)	HES
02/26/04	(H)	HES AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE LESIL MCGUIRE

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As sponsor of HCR 31, presented the bill  
and answered questions.

RICHARD WARRINGTON, Member

Alaska State Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Board

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 31.

NANCY BURKE, Program Officer  
Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority  
Department of Revenue  
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 31.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

#### **TAPE 04-15, SIDE A**

Number 0001

**CHAIR PEGGY WILSON** called the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:07 p.m. Representatives Wilson, Gatto, Wolf, Seaton, and Cissna were present at the call to order. Representative Coghill joined the meeting as it was in progress.

#### HCR 31-TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS MONTH

Number 0050

CHAIR WILSON announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 31, Proclaiming March 2004 as Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Month.

Number 0102

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO moved to adopt CSHCR 31, Version 23-LS1749\D, Utermohle, 2/24/04, as the working document. There being no objection, Version D was adopted as the working document.

Number 0145

REPRESENTATIVE LESIL McGUIRE, Alaska State Legislature, as sponsor of HCR 31, presented the bill and answered questions. She told the committee that traumatic brain injury has touched the lives of both her staff member, Ryan Makinster, and herself. Today Representative Berkowitz made comments on the floor that he questions why the legislature does resolutions [such as this], that it does not make any sense and the legislature should simply fund the programs, she said. Representative McGuire agreed that there is some merit to his statement; however, some of the things that are highlighted in resolutions

can be followed up with some funding from different programs. Representative McGuire explained that the legislature highlights a particular issue that it is important for people to become aware of. For example, the legislature has the opportunity to bring to light issues like [the importance of] breast cancer [screening], avalanche preparedness, and many other things that people do not take time out of their lives to think about unless there has been a some personal impact [on their lives].

Number 0228

REPRESENTATIVE MCGUIRE told the members that Alaska is one of the states most affected by traumatic brain injury (TBI) because it is a young state with a lot of very active people out doing all types of activities including hiking, skiing, motorcycle riding, and other high-risk activities. The younger a person is, generally, the more high-risk the activities [that are engaged in]. That is why this [Traumatic Brain Injury] Awareness Month is even more important in a state like Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE MCGUIRE said that once this bill passes, she and Ryan [Makinster] will be working to raise awareness through a variety of methods. She said that the sad fact is that many traumatic brain injuries are preventable. Some [ways of preventing TBI] are wearing helmets, driving the speed limit, and wearing a seatbelt.

Number 0341

REPRESENTATIVE MCGUIRE shared that she has a very personal connection to traumatic brain injury. Her brother was in a head-on collision on the Seward Highway when he was 17 years old. He has a traumatic brain injury. It changed her family's life dramatically. He was a National Merit Scholar, president of his class, a wrestler, and on his way to the same college that she was attending. Overnight it changed his whole life. He was wearing a seatbelt, she said. The accident occurred back when the Seward Highway wasn't as wide as it is now, and as he came around that hairpin turn, [traveling] a bit over the line, there was a collision with a motor home traveling in the other direction. Even wearing a seatbelt is not enough, she stated. For a long time it was not known if her brother would live. Jason was in a coma for three months. Most people believe that when someone is in a coma, he/she just wakes up. It is not like that at all. She commented that both Chair Wilson and Representative Gatto know that is not the way it works at all,

since they both work in fields [where they have had firsthand experience with TBI victims].

REPRESENTATIVE McGUIRE explained that there are not a lot of services available for traumatic brain injury victims. In fact, there is not one single place in the state of Alaska that provides rehabilitation services. There is a ward in Providence Hospital that can help if the TBI victim is at a more advanced stage with walking, she said. Representative McGuire explained that once someone has a severe traumatic brain injury, like her brother, the person has to learn how to go to the bathroom, how to tie shoes, and how to speak, for example. Her brother ended up going to the Good Samaritan Hospital in Puyallup, Washington. Many Alaskans have the good fortune to have insurance so they can go there, but many more do not. Representative McGuire explained that Jason's insurance ran out just as he was out of diapers and learning to tie his shoes. She said she could not imagine where Jason would be today if her father had not had a successful medical practice, but she suspects he would be in an institution, where a lot of TBI victims end up.

Number 0517

REPRESENTATIVE McGUIRE announced that on March 7th and 8th there will be the first-ever Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Conference in Anchorage. There will be nurses, doctors, and a rehabilitation specialist from the Lower 48, who will be coming up to discuss some things that can be done to make resources more available to TBI victims and their families. She said she believes it is timely to have this resolution and hopes it will generate discussion on the part of families with young children and teenagers in particular. Some of the victims in the support group in Anchorage are actually 50-year-old men and women who have had careers and suddenly their lives were changed. In some cases these people were the sole provider of a family, so this has changed the entire economic structure of a family.

REPRESENTATIVE McGUIRE added that there are many social aspects that result from a traumatic brain injury. For instance, when someone has broken his/her arm there is the cast on the arm and people understand that the person will not be able to carry the same load of books he/she might have before. However, when someone is a victim of TBI, it is unknown what is going on inside the mind, she said. If the frontal lobe is injured, the person may lose all the things that are taken for granted; for example, judgment on when to close one's mouth, when to be

motivated, when to go to bed, and when to use the bathroom at an appropriate time.

REPRESENTATIVE McGUIRE told the members that she has been waiting for an opportunity to do something for her brother in her legislative career. It is a small thing and she hopes the members will support it.

Number 0681

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA shared an experience she had when going door-to-door during the campaign. A woman asked her to come into her home. Representative Cissna said she was very nicely dressed, probably an executive in her professional life. The living room had been taken over by a huge, complicated bed. The young person in the bed was her 22-year-old son, who had been injured in a motorcycle accident. He had not been wearing a helmet. She said the boy had both a spinal cord injury and TBI. There was no one there, really, she commented. The woman had given up her job and had just enough family nearby that she was relieved two times per week. This boy had to be taken care of every minute of every day. The woman slept on the couch beside him and had been doing this for months. There would be a couple of hours when she would get time to run out to get groceries. Representative Cissna pointed out that with TBI, it is not just the injured person [who is impacted]; it can be many people in the family whose lives are changed.

Number 0842

REPRESENTATIVE McGUIRE replied that Representative Cissna makes a very good point. It is important to raise awareness at many different levels. She said the first level is prevention. For instance, in her brother's case, there were no airbags. The people on the scene were certain that had there been an airbag, Jason would not have had the brain injury. She said it is important to educate younger men of the importance of using helmets and seatbelts. Many parents look forward to getting their sons to the age of 25 safe and sound. Their sons may make some mistakes after that, but at least they will have all their faculties.

REPRESENTATIVE McGUIRE said the second part of this awareness plan is determining what can be done for a family that has this happen. She said that she found that in Alaska there was not one single book and no person to contact, and her family did not know where to go. Her father is a physician and her mother is a

highly educated person. They were overwhelmed and decisions had to be made very quickly about treatment. Representative McGuire told the members an important part of the awareness plan is making the community aware of the resources available to them.

REPRESENTATIVE MCGUIRE explained that the final part of this plan is the vocational training necessary to help a TBI victim who does have a level of functioning to learn how to become a part of society again. She said that it is known that anyone with a disability who can be put back to work develops a sense of self-worth. Representative McGuire told the members that she is proud to say that her brother is not on public assistance; he has a job at Fred Meyer's that he has had for seven years. It is a far cry from the lawyer he wanted to be, but he gets up every day, goes to work, and makes a wage.

Number 0995

REPRESENTATIVE MCGUIRE said that one of the things that is being considered is using some of the nonprofit resources to help make employers aware of some of the advantages of hiring people with disabilities. Another important [part of this plan] is making the TBI victims aware of some of the vocational training centers that are available in Alaska.

Number 1007

CHAIR WILSON announced for the record that Representative Coghill has joined the meeting.

Number 1029

RICHARD WARRINGTON, Member, Alaska State Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Board, testified in support of HCR 31. He told the members that he is a 25-year survivor of a traumatic brain injury and is very happy to hear that Representative McGuire is sponsoring HCR 31. He said that while he is glad that Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Month is in April, he wants the legislature to know that the U.S. Congress recognizes October as the national TBI awareness month. Last year the Kenai Peninsula Borough mayor, Dale Bagley, proclaimed October as TBI awareness month. Mr. Warrington suggested changes in the language of HCR 31.

Number 1198

CHAIR WILSON requested that Mr. Warrington fax the committee a copy of his suggested changes, which the committee will include with the bill when it goes to the next committee of referral.

MR. WARRINGTON announced that the 8th Annual Brain Injury Awareness Walk and Barbecue will be held on the first Saturday following the Memorial Day weekend. It will be on June 5th, registration begins at 10:30 a.m., and the walk starts at 11 a.m. The walk's course goes through beautiful downtown Kenai to the softball park pavilion, where there will be a barbecue, he said.

MR. WARRINGTON summarized his comments by sharing statistics from the World Health Organization, which says that there have been more deaths in the last 12 years due to brain injury than from all the wars the United States has fought over those 12 years.

Number 1231

NANCY BURKE, Program Officer, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Department of Revenue, testified in support of HCR 31. She told the members that she is currently working with an advisory board that is attempting to develop a statewide service-delivery mechanism for individuals with traumatic brain injury. Formerly, she said, she was the director of an agency that provided direct services to individuals with brain injuries. Ms. Burke implored the members to support this bill and help with the education efforts that are underway.

Number 1286

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON commented that he is doing his part by wearing his helmet while riding his motor scooter to work at the capitol.

CHAIR WILSON noted that there is a zero fiscal note.

Number 1310

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON moved to report CSHCR 31, Version 23-LS1749\D, Utermohle, 2/24/04, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHCR 31(HES) was reported out of the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:29 p.m.