

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

January 13, 2005

3:04 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Peggy Wilson, Chair  
Representative Tom Anderson  
Representative Vic Kohring  
Representative Lesil McGuire  
Representative Paul Seaton  
Representative Sharon Cissna  
Representative Berta Gardner

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT**

Senator Bettye Davis  
Representative David Guttenburg  
Representative John Coghill Jr.

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

OVERVIEWS: PUBLIC HEALTH PREPAREDNESS ISSUES BY DIV OF HEALTH DIRECTOR DICK MANDSAGER, M.D.; NATIVE FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM ON PILOT PROJECTS BY DIV OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE DIRECTOR KATHERINE FARNHAM

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

DICK MANDSAGER, M.D., Director  
Division of Public Health  
Alaska Department of Health & Social Services  
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the overview of the Division of Public Health.

KATHERINE FARNHAM, Director  
Division of Public Assistance  
Alaska Department of Health & Social Services  
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the overview of the Division of Public Assistance.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

**CHAIR PEGGY WILSON** called the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at [3:04:22 PM](#). Representatives Seaton, Kohring, McGuire, Cissna, and Gardner were present at the call to order. Representative Anderson arrived as the meeting was in progress. Also in attendance were Representative Guttenburg, Representative Coghill, and Senator Davis.

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CHAIR WILSON described the guidelines the committee would follow for the year.

OVERVIEWS:

#### PUBLIC HEALTH PREPAREDNESS ISSUES

[3:10:39 PM](#)

DICK MANDSAGER, M.D., Director, Division of Public Health, Department of Health and Social Services, explained his interest in public health issues. He presented slides and distributed a handout which described goals related to public health preparedness. He defined public health and described its focus on populations and prevention. He elaborated on the functions of the Division of Public Health in society with several stories. He stated that the division's primary goal is to set the stage for a public health bill, which would be introduced by Governor Murkowski in the coming week.

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DR. MANDSAGER referred to the handout entitled, "PUBLIC HEALTH: Protecting and Promoting the Health of all Alaskans", that had been distributed as part of the committee packet. He related that public health facilities are widespread in Alaska and are primarily run by the state.

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DR. MANDSAGER set the stage for the importance of new legislation. He explained the need for the creation and renovation of state facilities. He discussed specialized planning and issues of preparedness for threatening diseases. He stated that current laws do not give public health officials quarantine authority within the state of Alaska.

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DR. MANDSAGER talked about changes that have occurred since [the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001] and emphasized the need for preparedness planning in the future. He stated that there is a need to amend statute and create state legislation so that the division has authorization power in times of crisis.

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DR. MANDSAGER described the laboratory facility for virology in Fairbanks, Alaska. He stated that this laboratory is in poor condition and its reconstruction is dependent on federal funds. He pointed out that inadequate facilities and the issues that arise because of them create dilemmas with everyday needs as well as with full-blown emergencies.

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DR. MANDSAGER stated that the Division of Public Health strives to balance the needs of the public and the rights of the individual. He advocated for legislation that will enable the division to respond to potential crisis situations effectively.

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DR. MANDSAGER pointed out public health dilemmas summarized in an article entitled, "The Public Health Improvement Process in Alaska: Toward a Model Public Health Law" within his handout.

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DR. MANDSAGER talked about an assessment conducted by a team from the American Public Health Laboratory Group. He said that this team assessed the Alaska Virology Laboratory in Fairbanks, Alaska, and described the facility as an "accident waiting to happen." He discussed the importance of virology research, and explained a proposal to build a new laboratory on the University

of Alaska Fairbanks campus. Dr. Mandsager shared stories that related the importance of public health laboratory facilities in Alaska and their preventative capabilities.

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DR. MANDSAGER reminded the committee of the issue of tuberculosis and its effect on present day communities within Alaska. He offered relevant information.

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REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER inquired as to tuberculosis rates in Alaska in comparison with the rest of the United States.

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DR. MANDSAGER explained that there are many elders in Alaska who have tuberculosis. He explained that the disease is reintroduced to communities by these elders.

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REPRESENTATIVE SEATON inquired as to the division's missions and measures.

[3:48:00 PM](#)

DR. MANDSAGER described the division's process of missions and measures.

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COMMISSIONER JOEL GILBERTSON, Department of Health and Social Services, provided further information regarding missions and measures.

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DR. MANDSAGER, in response to Chair Wilson, described the spread of chlamydia and the percentage of Alaskans that are infected.

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REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER talked about alcoholism in Alaska, and inquired as to the division's position regarding the problem.

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DR. MANDSAGER responded that alcoholism issues are dealt with by the Division of Behavioral Health.

NATIVE FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

[3:51:54 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON turned the committee's attention to the next presenter.

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KATHERINE FARNHAM, Director, Division of Public Assistance, described the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF). She highlighted the success of this federally funded program which is also referred to as the Welfare to Work Program. She stated that the successes of this program have saved the State of Alaska a great deal of money and have provided benefits for Alaskans. Furthermore, this program has received "high performance" bonus funds for the last three years, which have enabled the growth and development of new programs.

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MS. FARNHAM described the Native Family Assistance Program. She stated that in 2000, the Alaska State Legislature implemented a law allowing for a state component to parallel the TANF program to tribal organizations. She explained that the Native Family Assistance Program enables the state to provide its funds to these tribal organizations to compliment their federal TANF grant. She stated that the legislature wanted to treat this [law] as a pilot project and requested a report of the success of these tribal TANF programs. The report, which was distributed to the legislature this week, illustrates the success of tribal programs. She explained the value of community-based locally owned programs. Such programs know the local families better and analysis has shown that tribal organizations have reduced more caseloads than state organizations. She stated that the recommendation from the [Division of Public Assistance] is to extend and make permanent the Native Family Assistance Program.

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CHAIR WILSON asked about tribal organization success rates.

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MS. FARNHAM stated that tribal organizations have flexibility connecting programs for clients. She explained that familiarity with families, cases, and the local economy fosters a successful situation for the clients involved.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at [4:09:54 PM](#).