

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

February 28, 2007

1:34 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Bettye Davis, Chair
Senator Joe Thomas, Vice Chair
Senator John Cowdery
Senator Fred Dyson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Kim Elton

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 40

"An Act relating to reapplications for the Alaska longevity bonus program; and providing for an effective date."

MOVED CSSB 40 (HES) OUT OF COMMITTEE

PRESENTATION: Strengthening Families Initiative

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 40

SHORT TITLE: LONGEVITY BONUS REAPPLICATIONS

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) WIELECHOWSKI

01/16/07 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/5/07
01/16/07 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/07 (S) HES, STA, FIN
02/07/07 (S) HES AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
02/07/07 (S) Heard & Held
02/07/07 (S) MINUTE(HES)
02/28/07 (S) HES AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

Senator Bill Wielechowski
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 40.

Tamara Cook, Director of Legal Services
Office of Legislative Affairs
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on SB 40

Stacie Kraly, Attorney
Department of Law
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801-1182
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on SB 40

Claudia Shanley, Systems Reform Administrator
Department of Health & Social Services
POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in presentation

Shirley Pitts, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Coordinator
Strengthening Families Initiative
POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in presentation

Lupita Alvarez, Director
Juneau Montessori School
POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in presentation

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR BETTYE DAVIS called the Senate Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at [1:34:08 PM](#). Present at the call to order were Senators Thomas, Dyson, Cowdery, and Chair Davis.

SB 40-LONGEVITY BONUS REAPPLICATIONS

CHAIR DAVIS announced SB 40 to be up for consideration.

[1:35:09 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI, sponsor of SB 40, said that certain technical changes had been made to the bill in order for the Department of Health and Social Services to administer it. He restated the goal of the bill regarding reapplication for the longevity bonus.

[1:36:43 PM](#)

TAM COOK, Director of Legal Services for the Office of Legislative Affairs, called the committee's attention to lines 10, 12, and 13 of the bill, which contain the changes in the bill pertaining to eligibility for reapplication.

She added that the changes addressed the committee's previous concerns completely.

[1:38:43 PM](#)

SENATOR COWDERY asked if a person who left the state during the period when the bonus was canceled could return and apply for it.

MS. COOK said that is correct, as long as they have remained a state resident without a continuous absence of more than three years.

SENATOR COWDERY asked for the sponsor's idea for the source of funding.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI replied that the bill will use general funds.

STACIE KRALY, Attorney for the Department of Law, commented that the department agrees with the changes.

[1:40:51 PM](#)

SENATOR THOMAS asked if the definition of a state resident is the same as that for Permanent Fund Dividend eligibility.

MS. KRALEY replied that it is.

SENATOR COWDERY said that he has received the bonus in the past, and asked if the previous practice of signing a receipt for the check will be continued.

MS. KRALEY said that the practice will continue.

[1:42:51 PM](#)

SENATOR COWDERY moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute to SB 40, labeled 25-LS0354\E, Version E, as the working document of the committee. There being no objection, the motion carried.

He then moved to report CS for SB 40 from committee with individual recommendations and accompanying fiscal notes and asked for unanimous consent.

There being no objection, CSSB 40(HES) moved from committee.

PRESENTATION: STRENGTHENING FAMILIES INITIATIVE

1:47:09 PM

CHAIR BETTYE DAVIS announced the presentation of the strengthening families initiative.

CLAUDIA SHANLEY, Systems Reform Administrator for the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), said that the Strengthening Families Initiative (SFI) is essentially about child abuse prevention. Early intervention is the most important factor in proper development and setting a foundation for good behavior and health. When protective relationships aren't available for children, brain and social development can be inhibited.

She explained that there are three levels of stress: positive, which is moderate and short-lived; tolerable stress, which could disrupt development but is usually buffered by supportive relationships; and toxic stress, which is intense, prolonged, and not offset by relational support. 35 percent of Protective Service Reports are done on children under five years of age.

She explained that a two-pronged approach is needed to promote healthy development: supporting families with early intervention, and more targeted intervention to help children already affected.

1:53:30 PM

SHIRLEY PITTS, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Coordinator for the SFI, said that in 2001 the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) developed a systematic approach to early intervention, focusing on child abuse prevention. At-risk families are targeted in particular, but intervention and prevention for everyone is best. Child daycares are used as points of education and to help identify early warning signs.

She explained the center's preventative measures, including teaching parental resilience, knowledge of parenting and child development, support in time of need, and social and emotional competence in children. Early education programs help facilitate emotional development and strengthen parenting skills, and staff respond to early signs of child abuse and neglect. 38 percent of children in Alaskan child care programs have exhibited behavioral issues.

She added that in 2004 Alaska was selected to receive two years of federal technical assistance for its early learning programs.

[2:01:10 PM](#)

MS. SHANLEY said that Alaska used the assistance to develop a leadership team to run the project in the state. They were charged with enhancing the collaboration between child care resource and referral networks. The Alaska programs selected for participation were the Boys & Girls Club, Open Arms, the Juneau Montessori School, the Rural CAP Child Development Center, and the Bristol Bay Head Start Program. Each program completed self-assessments, developed implementation plans, attended orientations and conferences, and received mini-grants of \$10,000, the funding for which came from the Alaska Children's Trust, Title VI, and Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems.

She added that the data from the pilot program hasn't been analyzed yet, but explained how all five programs showed progress in different areas.

[2:08:07 PM](#)

LUPITA ALVAREZ, Director for the Juneau Montessori School, said that many of the assessment program criteria were areas for improvement for her school. The program also helped parents network and make suggestions for the school, the sense of community was strengthened, and school activity attendance has gone up. Parents now have a better understanding of the importance of developing relationships with the teachers and other parents. The grant has also been used for mental health services for students in need.

[2:14:03 PM](#)

MS. SHANLEY said that the pilot programs were offering different options with their grant money, like free family dinners, parenting navigation programs, and cultural nights; many of these changes were small but significant. The pilot sites are also partnering with protective services, and students studying social work are also beginning to intern with the various programs. The initiative also presents its work to various groups statewide, and is looking at how to expand the model statewide.

[2:20:26 PM](#)

CHAIR DAVIS asked Ms. Shanley to talk about the conference in Illinois that the group recently attended.

MS. SHANLEY said that Illinois has had a very effective early education program, serving hundreds of children from infancy to adulthood throughout the state, and she explained some aspects of that state's success.

[2:23:06 PM](#)

SENATOR COWDERY asked if there is a difference in child development between rural and urban settings.

MS. SHANLEY replied that nutrition is a big problem in rural settings.

SENATOR COWDERY related a personal story about child-rearing.

[2:25:44 PM](#)

SENATOR THOMAS asked how such early education programs could be brought to people who do not, or can not, put their kids in child care.

MS. SHANLEY replied that this sort of education is mobile, and can be brought to different types of programs or locations where families are often found, like medical offices and schools.

SENATOR THOMAS commented that changes in school curriculum are often hard to come by.

[2:29:57 PM](#)

MS. ALVAREZ said that program efficacy is a matter of clarity and consistency of application, and with some families a little extra work is needed to make a connection. Also, extra staff time is needed, which leads to a financial constraint.

She added that young children are very impressionable, and television and media can cause behavioral issues.

SENATOR COWDERY related two personal stories.

[2:37:16 PM](#)

CHAIR DAVIS thanked the presenters, and asked if the initiative is at the end of its pilot program.

MS. SHANLEY replied that the Alaska program has come to an end, and that different states are now participating. Alaska will continue to meet with the other states, however, and participate in conferences.

CHAIR DAVIS asked about the National Children's Trust Fund.

MS. PITTS said that Alaska is a member of this organization, and participates in national meetings.

CHAIR DAVIS asked if there will ever be a time when the initiative will ask for money from the legislature.

MS. ALVAREZ replied that money is always needed to reach the children who need treatment the most.

CHAIR DAVIS commented on the good timing of the presentation and said that other programs in the state are working along the same lines.

MS. SHANLEY said that the initiative does work closely with other programs in Alaska, and that they are all looking for creative ways to further the work they do.

She added that the initiative needs to be connected to quality child care and family support.

CHAIR DAVIS thanked the presenters and, seeing being no further business to come before the committee, adjourned the meeting at [2:43:56 PM](#).