

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

March 5, 2007

1:33 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Bettye Davis, Chair
Senator John Cowdery

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Joe Thomas, Vice Chair
Senator Kim Elton
Senator Fred Dyson

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 62

"An Act establishing the Advisory Committee on Public Reporting of Health Care Associated Infections; relating to reporting and dissemination of data concerning health care associated infections; and providing for an effective date."

HEARD AND HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 76

"An Act establishing a higher education savings program for eligible children who were placed in out-of-home care by the state; and providing for confidentiality of identifying information of a beneficiary under the program."

HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 62

SHORT TITLE: TASK FORCE ON HEALTH CARE INFECTIONS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

01/19/07	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/19/07	(S)	HES, FIN
03/05/07	(S)	HES AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 76

SHORT TITLE: TUITION FOR CERTAIN CHILDREN

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) ELLIS

02/07/07	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
----------	-----	---------------------------------

02/07/07 (S) HES, FIN
03/05/07 (S) HES AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

Doug Letch, Aide
to Senator Stevens
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented SB 62

Jay Butler, Director
Division of Public Health
Department of Health & Social Services
Juneau AK

POSITION STATEMENT: In support of SB 62

Sandra Stark, representing herself
No address provided

POSITION STATEMENT: In support of SB 62

Rosemary Craig, representing herself
No address provided

POSITION STATEMENT: In support of SB 62

Jennifer Grogg
Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association (ASHNHA)
Mat-Su Valley AK

POSITION STATEMENT: In support of SB 62

Kim Mymes-Spink
Professionals in Epidemiology
No address provided

POSITION STATEMENT: In support of SB 62

Mike Lesmann, Community Relations Manager
Office of Children's Services
Juneau AK

POSITION STATEMENT: In support of SB 76

Gabe Aceves, aide to Senator Ellis
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Available for questions on SB 76

Terra Horton
Faith Based and Community Initiatives

No address provided

POSITION STATEMENT: In support of SB 76

Jim Lynch, Associate Vice President of Finance
University of Alaska
Fairbanks AK

POSITION STATEMENT: In support of SB 76

Chip Wagoner, Executive Director
Alaska Conference of Catholic Bishops
Juneau AK

POSITION STATEMENT: In support of SB 76

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR BETTYE DAVIS called the Senate Health, Education and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at [1:33:45 PM](#). Present at the call to order were Senator Cowdery and Chair Davis.

SB 62-TASK FORCE ON HEALTH CARE INFECTIONS

CHAIR DAVIS announced SB 63 to be under consideration. She added that because of the lack of a quorum, the committee would only be hearing testimony and would not be moving the bill that day.

DOUG LETCH, aide to Senator Gary Stevens, sponsor of SB 62, said that the bill would set up an advisory committee on public reporting of health-care-associated infections, which would be managed by the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS). The committee would include a senator and representative, nine members appointed by the governor, and a state official in charge of epidemiology. The nine appointed members would include physicians, a representative of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, a representative of the Alaska chapter of the Association of Professionals in Infection Control, a representative of the Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association (ASHNHA), urban and rural consumers, and a statistician.

He explained that the committee's role will include developing recommendations for analyzing and distributing information related to preventing hospital infection, and will provide its recommendations to the DHSS by 2009. By January of 2011 it will provide the legislature with a report addressing the unique challenges facing Alaska in regards to the issue.

He added that many states do this sort of analysis and reporting.

[1:38:12 PM](#)

JAY BUTLER, Director of the Division of Public Health for the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), said that infections in health care settings have highlighted a need for public health attention in hospitals. Much intensive health care intervention is now done on an out-patient basis, and patients are sent home who may be sicker than those in the hospital. This has led to a consumer-driven interest in public disclosure of hospitals' infection rates. As many as two million infection cases are associated with health care settings yearly; the mortality rate is around 90,000 each year. A number of states require public disclosure of these rates, but challenges include accurate identification of infections; oftentimes infections don't develop until discharge from the hospital. In addition, public disclosure could act as a disincentive to use of hospitals; the more thorough a hospital is in its reporting, the more the hospital appears to be negligent in its care.

He added that a special challenge in Alaska is the small patient population, which means difficulties in reporting useful data. Also there is no evidence that public reporting will improve health. Studies have shown that certain criteria should be followed in reporting, including using established public health surveillance methods, a multidisciplinary advisory panel, and appropriate process and outcome measures; he gave examples of processes and outcomes that should be studied. A final recommendation would be that the agency measuring the data provide regular and confidential feedback to health care providers.

[1:47:08 PM](#)

CHAIR DAVIS thanked Mr. Butler for his presentation and said that she look forward to forming the task force.

SENATOR COWDERY related a personal story about hospital infections.

[1:49:30 PM](#)

SANDRA STARK, representing herself, said she is a public member of the initial working group. She said that lives will be saved by this legislation, perhaps an indeterminate number but

doubtless many. Practices are varied for preventing infection and they do make a great difference. Monitoring hospital infection prevention through a pilot program will mean less costs and hospitalizations, the rates of which are very high in Alaska.

[1:52:12 PM](#)

ROSEMARY CRAIG, representing herself, said she had worked with Ms. Stark on the Lower Kenai Peninsula and it would be advantageous for the entire state to have some kind of tracking, but that she was concerned with how larger and smaller hospitals would be compared; she requested that the committee investigate this further.

[1:53:06 PM](#)

JENNIFER GROGG, representing the Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association (ASHNHA), said that it supports an advisory committee on hospital infections. Such a committee would be able to review the success of states with similar legislation and advise Alaska. Creating equitable guidelines is difficult, and Alaska's should be tailored to the state's specific needs; outpatient facilities should be included in the reporting process.

[1:56:13 PM](#)

KIM MYMES-SPINK, with Professionals in Epidemiology, said that the group supports the bill and would be happy to participate on the task force.

CHAIR DAVIS closed public testimony for SB 62 and said the committee would hear the bill again at a later date.

SB 76-TUITION FOR CERTAIN CHILDREN

[1:58:16 PM](#)

CHAIR BETTYE DAVIS announced SB 76 to be up for consideration.

SENATOR ELLIS, sponsor of SB 76, said that the bill concerns the collection of education funds for foster youth who age out of the system and who often do not succeed in life afterwards. He said that Missouri has a similar program that allows the funding of education accounts for children leaving foster care at the age of 18; SB 76 would establish such a program in Alaska to

allow churches, individuals, charities, and community organizations to open accounts for the purposes of these youths' college education. The accounts would be managed through the University of Alaska (UA)'s college savings account program. The donations could be used for any educational endeavor, from vocational education to college.

He added that many foster children have suffered from abuse and neglect, and their caretakers cannot be expected to provide education savings for them. The bill will help foster youth become more productive citizens.

CHAIR DAVIS said that she thinks the bill will be successful and she looks forward to helping it pass through.

MIKE LESMANN, Community Relations Manager for the Office of Children's Services (OCS), said that the OCS is very supportive of the bill. The Faith-based and Community Initiatives Office of the DHSS is also in support of the bill, and together the offices look forward to developing information-sharing procedures with the UA and directing monies donated to the program.

[2:05:16 PM](#)

SENATOR COWDERY asked what will happen to the money if a foster child doesn't use it.

GABE ACEVES, Staff to Senator Ellis, replied that the beneficiary name on a given account can be changed if a youth decides not to use the money.

[2:06:35 PM](#)

TERRA HORTON, Faith Based and Community Initiatives, said that as a social worker she is aware of the challenges facing foster youth. They are at a higher risk for many factors such as poverty, drug abuse, homelessness, etc.; few are able to pursue their desires for further education, financial difficulties being the major deterrent. This bill would diminish the financial challenge to these kids and let them lead more self-sufficient, productive lives.

[2:09:31 PM](#)

SENATOR ELLIS thanked Ms. Horton for her participation in the program.

2:10:03 PM

JIM LYNCH, Associate Vice President of Finance for the University of Alaska, said that the UA supports SB 76 and has participated in drafting the bill to see that it works in unison with the college savings program. He said that the importance of a college account creates or intensifies aspirations of foster youth and it is an outstanding program that has no downsides. The money can be switched around between beneficiaries and will be invested as well.

2:12:25 PM

SENATOR ELLIS said that Mr. Lynch helped with making sure that the legislation would work smoothly with the UA program.

MR. ACEVES explained that a provision in the bill makes children in long-term, out-of-state foster care the highest funding priority. The department may establish specific criteria as well as the donors, but the two most important criteria are the age of the child and the length of their stay in out-of-home care.

DAVIS asked if a child who ages out of the system can use the funds at any point or they must do so immediately.

MR. ACEVES replied that the funds are good until the youth reaches the age of 30.

MR. LYNCH added that there is no practical limitation within the college savings program.

2:16:50 PM

CHIP WAGONER, the Executive Director for the Alaska Conference of Catholic Bishops (ACCB), said that the bill is important because the government cannot do everything in terms of providing for youth; the community needs to take some of the responsibility. The bill will provide a needed boost for foster youth, and marketing the program is particularly important because people, corporations, and non-profits need to know about it to participate.

CHAIR DAVIS remarked that Alaskans are known to be giving people, and the program will be successful. She added that the bill will be brought before the committee in the near future.

There being no further business to come before the committee,
Chair Davis adjourned the meeting at [2:20:21 PM](#).