

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 15, 2007

1:38 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Johnny Ellis, Chair  
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair  
Senator Bettye Davis  
Senator Con Bunde

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Lyman Hoffman

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 108(L&C)

"An Act extending the termination date for the Board of Marine Pilots; and providing for an effective date."

MOVED CSHB 108(L&C) OUT OF COMMITTEE

OVERVIEW: Current Challenges to Women in the Alaska Workplace

SENATE BILL NO. 99

"An Act relating to the composition of the Alaska Police Standards Council; and providing for an effective date."

SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

SENATE BILL NO. 18

"An Act relating to property foreclosures and executions; and amending Rule 65, Alaska Rules of Civil Procedure."

SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 108

SHORT TITLE: BOARD OF MARINE PILOTS

SPONSOR(S): LABOR & COMMERCE

01/25/07	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/25/07	(H)	L&C, FIN
02/14/07	(H)	L&C AT 3:00 PM CAPITOL 17
02/14/07	(H)	Moved CSHB 108(L&C) Out of Committee
02/14/07	(H)	MINUTE(L&C)

02/15/07 (H) L&C RPT CS(L&C) 7DP  
02/15/07 (H) DP: GARDNER, BUCH, GATTO, RAMRAS,  
LEDOUX, NEUMAN, OLSON  
02/21/07 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM HOUSE FINANCE 519  
02/21/07 (H) Moved CSHB 108(L&C) Out of Committee  
02/21/07 (H) MINUTE(FIN)  
02/22/07 (H) FIN RPT CS(L&C) 9DP  
02/22/07 (H) DP: GARA, CRAWFORD, HAWKER, JOULE,  
THOMAS, NELSON, STOLTZE, MEYER,  
CHENAULT  
02/26/07 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)  
02/26/07 (H) VERSION: CSHB 108(L&C)  
02/28/07 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/28/07 (S) L&C, FIN  
03/13/07 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 211  
03/13/07 (S) Heard & Held  
03/13/07 (S) MINUTE(L&C)  
03/15/07 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 211

**WITNESS REGISTER**

GERAN TARR, Director  
Alaskans for Choice Alliance  
Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented overview on current challenges to women in the Alaska workplace.

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA  
Alaska State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on challenges to women in the Alaska workplace.

SARAH GROSSHUESCH  
Alaska Breastfeeding Coalition  
Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on challenges to women in the Alaska workplace.

CINDY SPANYERS  
Alaska Public Employees Association (APEA/AFT)  
Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on women's pay scale issues in the Alaska workplace.

ROBIN SMITH

Arctic Wire Rope & Supply

No address provided

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on insurance in the workplace issues.

BRENDA STANFIELD

Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault  
Fairbanks AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on insurance in the workplace.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

**CHAIR JOHNNY ELLIS** called the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at [1:38:39 PM](#). Present at the call to order were Senators Davis, Bunde, Stevens and Ellis. Chair Ellis announced that SB 99 and SB 18 would not be heard today. He said the sponsors and committee staff are still working on those pieces of legislation.

#### **CSHB 108(L&C)-BOARD OF MARINE PILOTS**

CHAIR ELLIS announced CSHB 108 (L&C) to be up for consideration.

[1:40:26 PM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS moved to pass CSHB 108(L&C) from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note. There were no objections and it was so ordered.

Overview: Current Challenges to Women in the Alaska Workplace

CHAIR ELLIS invited Ms. Tarr to come forward and said that she was his former chief of staff and was one of the organizers of the women's summit. She would present the overview on challenges to women in the Alaska workplace.

GERAN TARR, Director, Alaskans for Choice Alliance, said she organized this two day women's summit to cover a broad range of issues affecting women in Alaska from reproductive rights to health care options. She said she would highlight the issues that affect their ability to maintain jobs. She hoped ideas would be generated on things that could be worked on in the future.

[1:43:01 PM](#)

CHAIR ELLIS invited Representative Cissna to join the committee and said she is the sponsor of the breast feeding in the

workplace bill in the House and he is sponsor of the same bill in the Senate.

[1:43:31 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA said this issue was brought to her by one of her neighbors. She related that her own mother thought women didn't breastfeed in the workplace. She ended up having extraordinarily severe allergies and at six months was dying of starvation and secondary infections from the rashes she had on her body. However, when she had her own daughter, she was a single parent and had to work and she had to also meet employer expectations.

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SARAH GROSSHUESCH, Alaska Breastfeeding Coalition board member, related that breastfeeding has many scientifically proven health benefits versus formula feeding. Those benefits actually increase with the duration a woman breast feeds. Some of those benefits are fewer ear infections, fewer gastro-intestinal and respiratory illnesses; it also provides protective factors against childhood obesity. It provides protective benefits for the mother as well.

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Pregnancy Risk Assessment Management Systems (CRAMS) has some analyses of breastfeeding rates. They indicate that Alaska has phenomenal initiation rates; it is always in the top three, but unfortunately, that isn't maintained. Why that happens is the coalition's main concern.

Statistics showed that 42 percent of mothers were still in school or working outside the home; 55.5 percent of them were still breastfeeding four months after giving birth, significantly less than the 63.3 percent of non-working mothers who were still breastfeeding. The goal is to have 50 percent of mothers in Alaska breastfeeding six months after giving birth by 2010. It was discovered that 9 percent of mothers took their baby to work. Of those, 70.8 percent were still breastfeeding (opposed to the 53.8 percent who left their children at a childcare cottage).

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MS. TARR said the top five reasons women stop breastfeeding are: difficulty nursing, the baby is not satisfied with the breast milk, the mother is not producing enough milk, mom's nipples were sore, and at 23.1 percent it was because mom went back to work or school.

She thought the most pertinent piece of information came from a WIC professional who put together random sampling of charts from the WIC clinic. Of the 98 breastfeeding women on the charts who returned to work, only 17 were able to pump milk while at work. The reasons cited were: the boss was a man and said he would be uncomfortable, not getting a break, and having no private place to do it. Statistics from WIC and Denali Kid Care show those babies that aren't getting breast milk are going to cost the system more money.

CHAIR ELLIS said he envisioned having legislation before them at a later time and said since the committee is about labor and commerce issues, it would be concerned about the tradeoffs in the workplace - even though her arguments about the value of breastfeeding carry the day. He asked her to help the committee think about the tradeoffs in the workplace - what are reasonable requests and things that might not be so easily accommodated.

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MS. GROSSHUESCH replied a perfect world would have a progressive policy. SEARHC allows babies to come to work, but it has small clinics. Legislation should look for a minimum standard; privacy and break time are important and a place to express milk other than a restroom.

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA added that her legislation says "not a toilet stall" and usually room can be found for a chair somewhere. The legislation doesn't restrict the imagination at all and leaves room for employers to come up with solutions. She pointed out that there are lots of good reasons for keeping the employee at work.

CHAIR ELLIS asked Ms. Grosshuesch if her organization has begun to talk with business organizations like the National Federation of Independent Business or the State Chamber - to bring them along on this issue.

MS. GROSSHUESCH replied that is her intention. They have endorsement from the National Education Association (NEA) that felt it wasn't reasonable for them to offer that benefit if they couldn't guarantee that the beneficiaries could use it at work. They have other endorsements from health organizations.

CHAIR ELLIS asked to get the endorsements because that makes promoting it in the legislature easier.

MS. GROSSHUESCH added that it is many times offered in conjunction with employee wellness plans, which are taking off in Alaska.

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KELLY OAKS, UAA student, said she is doing a one-year internship with Planned Parenthood to complete her degree. She has been researching prescription equity and after calling the 100 top private businesses in Alaska found that not all companies' plans that cover prescriptions cover contraceptive services. Only one-third of the companies she called provide contraceptive coverage for their employees.

MS. OAKS said she works part time while she is going to school, and her company is one that doesn't cover contraceptive services. It can cost a woman an average of \$1,000 more per year than a comparable male might pay.

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CHAIR ELLIS asked what other states are doing on this issue.

MS. OAKS replied that 26 states already require prescription equity.

SENATOR DAVIS asked if she is interested in introducing legislation.

MS. OAKS replied yes and that she is working with someone right now.

[1:59:22 PM](#)

CINDY SPANYERS, APEA/AFT, said she is also a mother. A couple of months ago her son picked increasing the minimum wage for an essay topic. He was excited about Congress's efforts to increase the minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to more than \$7.00 an hour. He was asked why that was relevant to him and he responded that increasing the minimum wage would help the lives of working Americans and help his life as well.

She said that even working full-time, 50 weeks a year, a minimum wage employee earns just \$14,300 a year. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development does not have a breakdown of the gender of minimum wage workers, but they do know that certain professions generally pay minimum wage. Those professions include childcare workers, retail sales clerks, housekeeping, office clerks, and food service workers. These professions are dominated by women. For instance, she said nearly 60 percent of

retail clerks, 80 percent of clerks and 78 percent of waiters and waitresses are women. Increasing the minimum wage will help them all with a better standard of living.

MS. SPANYERS said the reasons for the gender difference aren't entirely clear. The September 2003 "Alaska Economic Trends" speculated on a few reasons. They include career choices, differences in full-time versus part-time work, education and training levels, years of experience and possibly discrimination. There is no data to measure the wage rates, hours worked and education level for individual workers by gender, only by profession. However, one area is known to have lower gender differences and that is with local government employees. Women earn \$.76 for every \$1.00 a man earns by being employed in state or local governments.

She said it's too early to tell how women workers will do under the new defined contribution retirement system, but she asked them to keep the following factors in mind when enacting public policy. In general women earn less than men, invest more conservatively and live longer. Women juggle many things in their lives and usually take care of others before taking care of themselves. It's unlikely that present salaries in the female dominated professions from administrative assistants to paraprofessionals will ever allow them enough to save for their retirement.

In conclusion, she said there are differences between men and women wage earners and it might not be easy crafting a one-size fits all policy for all groups. However, she encouraged them to imagine a variety of work that people do every day in both the private and public sectors. She thanked them for taking the time today to explore this very important issue to Alaskans.

[2:06:01 PM](#)

SENATOR BUNDE asked if the federal minimum wage law excluded America Samoa along with the Marianna Islands that do a lot of fish processing.

MS. SPANYERS replied her understanding is that it wasn't included.

SENATOR BUNDE said he knows that some wait staff make really substantial tips. He asked if there had been any thought put into putting an upper limit on tips so that anything above a certain amount would be considered part of a salary.

MS. SPANYERS replied she hadn't had those discussions.

[2:07:26 PM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS asked if her figures for women's wages were state or national.

MS. SPANYERS replied the figures were from the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

CHAIR ELLIS asked if she had an update of what is happening in Congress and was the minimum wage bill still in the Senate.

MS. SPANYERS said she didn't know the status.

[2:09:50 PM](#)

ROBIN SMITH, Arctic Wire Rope & Supply, said one of the problems she knows about as a business owner with less than 15 employees is that it's very expensive to offer insurance to the employees for some sort of reasonable rate. She suggested allowing small companies to pool together to spread the risk among a broader group of people. Possibly more businesses would cover their employees if insurance wasn't so expensive.

CHAIR ELLIS asked what she thought about mandatory health insurance coverage with incentives and penalties for businesses of various sizes to provide health insurance - like what is happening in California and Massachusetts.

MS. SMITH said that mandates are difficult because people have a lot of resentment about being told by government what to do. Small business would claim it would put them out of business. If the cost of insurance could be lowered and incentives were created to encourage formation of insurance pools, that would be a better way to handle it.

[2:12:52 PM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS said she remembers legislation on business pools for insurance coming before the legislature. She also mentioned that she thought a bill had already been introduced on this subject.

CHAIR ELLIS said he and Senator Davis, who chairs the HESS Committee, have had preliminary discussions about a joint hearing to listen to business people from various-sized organizations talk about what is going on in the insurance marketplace and problems with providing insurance. Everybody

else in the industrialized world has figured it out and it's hard for U.S. businesses to compete in that environment.

[2:16:14 PM](#)

BRENDA STANFIELD, Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Fairbanks, urged the committee to consider what social service people are paid and that in 1988 she paid a college graduate \$11.70 an hour and provided some health insurance, but 19 years later, they are still getting paid \$11.70 an hour and now instead of being offered full health care, they have to pay a portion of its cost and their children are no longer insured. A lot of changes happened, but they are being faced with a high employee turnover and not being able to hire people. She said the cost of living in Alaska has dramatically increased over the past years.

SENATOR BUNDE invited her to join them in their quest to maintain some quality of life and share some budget realities. He said the state will likely be in a deficit in two years at current spending.

Unless until, I think, the public makes some serious decisions about using some of the earnings of the Permanent Fund, we're going to be in some deep trouble. Because I don't think we can tax our way - many people say well we want a tax first - but I don't think we can take that much money out of the economy and not do some very negative things. But yet we have \$1 billion a year in excess earnings that we could access if the general public will support that notion. The plan has been around for years where we would use a portion of the earnings to support state services and still have a substantial dividend. But we're going to need your help.

CHAIR ELLIS asked her to comment on the state of child care in the Fairbanks area.

MS. STANFIELD replied that child care is very difficult especially for infants; it's very expensive - about \$800 a child and there are not enough providers.

CHAIR ELLIS thanked everyone very much for making the effort to with them in Juneau. He said the committee was open to her suggestions. He adjourned the meeting at [2:21:45 PM](#).

