

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 6, 2009

8:06 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Bettye Davis, Vice Chair  
Senator Charlie Huggins  
Senator Donald Olson  
Senator Gary Stevens

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 105

"An Act relating to continuing the secondary public education of a homeless student; relating to the purpose of certain laws as they relate to children; relating to tuition waivers, loans, and medical assistance for a child placed in out-of-home care by the state; relating to foster care; relating to children in need of aid; relating to foster care transition to independent living; and relating to juvenile programs and institutions."

MOVED CSSB 105(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 105

SHORT TITLE: FOSTER CARE/CINA/EDUCATION OF HOMELESS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) DAVIS

02/11/09	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/11/09	(S)	EDC, HSS, FIN
03/25/09	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 211
03/25/09	(S)	Heard & Held
03/25/09	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/03/09	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 211
04/03/09	(S)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
04/06/09	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 211

**WITNESS REGISTER**

TOM OBERMEYER, staff to Senator Davis  
State Capital

Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Commented on CSSB 105(EDC) for the sponsor.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supported CSSB 105(EDC).

TERESA TANOURY LUMBARDO, Senior Director

Casey Family Programs

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supported CSSB 105(EDC).

AMANDA METIVIER, Statewide Coordinator

Facing Foster Care in Alaska (FFCA)

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supported SB 105.

JEAN MISCHEL, Legislative Counsel

Division of Legal and Research Services

Legislative Affairs Agency

Alaska Legislature

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions on CSSB 105(EDC).

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:06:36 AM](#)

**VICE-CHAIR BETTYE DAVIS** called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Huggins, Olson and Davis.

#### **SB 105-FOSTER CARE/CINA/EDUCATION OF HOMELESS**

[8:06:54 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR DAVIS announced SB 105 to be up for consideration.

TOM OBERMEYER, staff to Senator Davis, prime sponsor of SB 105, said he would address CSSB 105, version \R, which was introduced previously.

MR. OBERMEYER said this bill provides tuition waivers to students who are or have been in the foster care system who can't go to college at all, and who are often homeless for some period of time after the age of 18. It provides support after they leave foster care, and helps them move into transitional living with some monetary living expenses for a short period of time. It is intended to cover several deficiencies in the foster

care system in Alaska; it won't cover everything but it will cover what is absolutely necessary at this time.

[8:11:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA, sponsor of HB 126 (similar to SB 105), thanked the committee for bringing up this issue. He said this bill is a synthesis of several bills over the past several years that have tried to come up with a comprehensive fix that would not require major staff additions to the Office of Children's Services (OCS) and that will meet the basic requirements.

One of the major problems in Alaska and nationwide is the number of youth who come out of foster care and are homeless. They have no phone call lifeline. Recent UA studies show that about 30-40 percent of Alaska foster youth end up homeless at some point in their life after leaving foster care. So, this bill extends the rental assistance program that OCS provides for kids who come out called the Independent Living Program from two months to a year by removing the arbitrary cutoff for college or vocational educational aid. Right now 10 scholarships are provided by OCS through private foundation and general fund money.

[8:14:19 AM](#)

The bill also expands a successful federal model by expanding the definition of "homeless" to include "all foster youth". Many youths bounce between homes frequently, so they bounce between schools as well. "As you bounce between schools, you fail; that's just what happens," Representative Gara said. One of the best things you can do is keep youth in the same school during a school year. This help is already provided on a federal level in McKinney-Vento, to a certain group of foster kids - those awaiting a foster care placement. But once they are in the foster care system, that transportation funding is not provided. This provision is aimed at helping homeless youth, but "homeless" is interpreted to mean "homeless-plus youth awaiting foster care." That definition is expanded in this bill to "all foster youth." Every school has a McKinney-Vento coordinator.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA said the final provision says the state should follow the federal rule, which is that foster youth should be visited at least once a month by their social worker. The recent draft of the federal review of the state's compliance with the federal laws said that roughly a third of the kids are being visited less than once every eight months. So, OCS is doing a much better job of that over the last few months (since they got the review), but even they say it is very important in

figuring out what a foster youth needs to be moved to a permanent home.

[8:16:43 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked for the parameters of the provision that gives state aid for education up to age 29.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA explained that you want to give youth the ability to get job training after they get out of foster care or college education if they want that. The question is how many years to give them to complete their degree or to figure out what they want to do. The question is at what age lawmakers want to use. It's a policy call.

[8:18:01 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS said he knows several people who are involved in foster care and they say the foster kids continue to call them as if they were the parents; so he is not sure that they don't have that lifeline.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA responded that some foster families are wonderful and do provide that, but many feel that their obligation ends at age 18 and some don't even have a foster family by age 18; they "age-out" at Covenant House. A lot of youth don't have anybody to talk to when they come out or they will have somebody to talk to, but no real lifeline afterwards. His personal experience with his foster family is that any contact there was after age 18 was from him - for whatever reason.

[8:19:45 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked how he managed to be successful based on his foster family experience.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA answered that he was lucky to have only two foster placements when he was in the system so he didn't bounce between schools. He had a family until age 6 that was very big on education, and sent him to a private school for a year; and he was read to. He also had two older siblings who made him do his homework and got him involved in extracurricular activities. They were his lifeline when he got out of college.

[8:21:00 AM](#)

SENATOR OLSON asked if rural schools have a McKinney-Vento coordinator.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA replied that legally every school has to have one; it is more applicable to the larger cities that have many schools. Kids are moved from one side of town to the other all the time. McKinney-Vento won't really apply if you move from Nome to Bethel. In small school districts, everybody has some teacher or staff member who is designated as a McKinney-Vento coordinator, but there is often only one school.

SENATOR OLSON asked if his bill [HB 126] closer to the A or the R version of SB 105.

REPRESENTATIVE GARA replied that it is closer to the R version.

SENATOR OLSON said the concern with homeless, whether they are urban or rural, is the huge amount of remedial work that goes on through the University and he asked if that had been factored into the fiscal note.

[8:23:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARA replied that it probably had not been factored into the fiscal note. The University loses money on students who are on any program outside of liberal arts - even if they pay their tuition. The school he went to had a remedial school to catch kids up who came in without proper preparation.

[8:25:01 AM](#)

TERESA TANOURY LUMBARDO, Senior Director, Casey Family Programs, said they are a private foundation that has been in Alaska for about seven years. She said Casey has been involved in a collaborative project involving the Alaska Court System, the Office of Public Advocacy, Office of Children's Services, the Anchorage School District, the Safety in Foster Care in Alaska, and many others. They had meetings around the state to talk about improving educational outcomes for foster care.

The courts are involved because judges have a checklist to ask every time a child in foster care comes before them asking basic things to make sure that education is covered. Including the word "education" into the child welfare statutes helps folks understand that they have the authority to ask these questions and to report back on how the child is doing in school. They know from research that school stability means so much for these children for the reasons already mentioned. She said homeless kids need support and they need it early. She closed by offering herself as a resource to the committee.

[8:28:47 AM](#)

AMANDA METIVIER, Statewide Coordinator, Facing Foster Care in Alaska (FFCA), supported SB 105. She said when foster kids move from one home to another, they also change schools, and school may be the only point of stability they have.

[8:30:28 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS said his wife is the principal of an alternative school and he understands that up to 30 to 40 percent of kids in the Anchorage area move between schools, and he asked if that is right and what the rate is among foster kids.

MS. METEVIER replied that the number is higher in Anchorage because it has more schools. She said that recently they found that younger children were moving more than the older kids, but she didn't have firm numbers.

[8:32:24 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if students stay with the same foster family, would they stay in the same school.

MS. METEVIER said that is true, but some placements are changed frequently. Her own foster daughter had 24 placements in 5 years.

At ease from 8:34 a.m. to 8:38 a.m.

[8:38:40 AM](#)

SENATOR OLSON moved to report CSSB 105(EDC) from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[8:41:03 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS joined the meeting, and said he would appreciate a refresher on the bill before voting.

[8:42:00 AM](#)

MR. OBERMEYER quickly reviewed the CS.

[8:44:20 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if the transportation language has some flexibility.

MR. OBERMEYER replied that the bill says the transportation has to be within reason. The funding also has to be available for these special provisions. Right now the Anchorage School District spends about \$175,000/yr. transporting and they say it's not nearly enough.

[8:46:30 AM](#)

JEAN MISCHEL, Legislative Counsel, Division of Legal and Research Services, Legislative Affairs Agency, said language on page 2, line 4, provides the exception. She explained that the parents of a deaf child sued under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Since a program wasn't available that was appropriate for their child when they moved away from the school, they demanded transportation services back to his original school, a school for the deaf.

[8:47:54 AM](#)

VICE CHAIR DAVIS found there were no objections; and CSSB 105(EDC) moved from committee.

There being no further business to come before the committee, Vice Chair Davis adjourned the meeting at 8:48 a.m.