

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 26, 2009

1:34:47 PM

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Bettye Davis, Chair  
Senator Joe Paskvan, Vice Chair  
Senator Johnny Ellis  
Senator Joe Thomas  
Senator Fred Dyson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 35

"An Act extending the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; and providing for an effective date."

HEARD AND HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 35

SHORT TITLE: EXTEND SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) DAVIS

01/21/09	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/09
01/21/09	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/21/09	(S)	HSS, FIN

**WITNESS REGISTER**

TOM OBERMEYER, Staff  
to Senator Bettye Davis  
State Capitol  
Juneau AK  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced SB 35.

PAT DAVIDSON, Auditor  
Legislative Audit Division  
Juneau, AK  
**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supported SB 35.

DIANE CASTO, Manager  
Prevention and Early Intervention  
Division of Behavioral Health  
Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)  
Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supported SB 35.

MELISSA STONE, Director  
Division of Behavioral Health  
Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)  
Juneau, AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supported SB 35.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**CHAIR BETTYE DAVIS** called the Senate Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Dyson, Paskvan, Ellis and Davis.

SENATOR THOMAS joined the committee.

#### **SB 35-EXTEND SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL**

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CHAIR DAVIS announced consideration of SB 35.

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TOM OBERMEYER, Staff to Senator Davis, introduced SB 35 . This bill is to extend the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council to June 30, 2013 and establish an effective date. He read from the sponsor statement:

SB 35 extends the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council to June 30, 2013. Suicide is a very serious public health concern in Alaska, particularly among young males and the native population. Extension of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council is important in curtailing this avoidable loss of life. The mission of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council is to advise the governor and the legislature on issues relating to suicide. In collaboration with communities, faith-based organizations and public-private entities, the Council

works to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans by reducing suicide and its effect on individuals and communities.

MR. OBERMEYER went on to say that Alaska has the highest age-adjusted suicide rate of all states at 21.1 per 100,000 population. Alaska has twice that rate among the native population and the unabated rate of suicide for the past number of years has been pretty constant. The main reason for the extension of this council is to reduce this continuing problem.

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CHAIR DAVIS asked for questions or comments from the committee concerning the extension.

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SENATOR ELLIS asked if the extension date in the bill comports with the recommendation of the audit report.

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MR. OBERMEYER said he believes it does.

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PAT DAVIDSON, Auditor, Legislative Audit Division, Juneau, AK, responded that the extension is supported by the recommendation. The statute called for up to an eight-year extension for boards, commissions and councils. Legislative Audit recommended four years because the Council is having difficulty establishing a voting quorum. Four years ago they recommended that the governor's office make more timely appointments but they still see problems there. This year their recommendation is to look at the composite of the Council; make the legislative members non-voting members; perhaps loosen some of the requirements for membership to the council, which are very narrowly construed. Additionally, they recommended that when making grants to communities for suicide prevention issues, the Division of Behavioral Health align the grants going out to the suicide prevention plan developed by the Council. Since that time, there has been a change in the trend in grant-making toward more comprehensive grants; but they still want to see grants align with the goals and functions of the Council.

SENATOR ELLIS asked Ms. Davidson if the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Behavioral Health would be willing to assist them in examining the composition of the Council and the requirements for membership.

MS. DAVIDSON said they certainly would.

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CHAIR DAVIS said she would be willing to hold the bill pending discussion with the executive branch and bring back the recommendations at the next meeting.

1:45:03 PM

DIANE CASTO, Manager, Prevention and Early Intervention, Division of Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Social Services, agreed with the committee's comments and with the recommendations of the audit report. She advised that the division has had some brief conversations with the council members about these changes. The Council will be having their quarterly meeting February 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> and they will take this up at that time.

1:47:17 PM

MELISSA STONE, Director, Behavioral Health Division, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), said the division agrees with the comments and the background that was provided . She pointed out that the Statewide Suicide Council was established in fiscal year 02 as a state planning and coordinating agency for issues related to suicide and suicide prevention. It was in July 2008 that the oversight of the Council was moved within Department of Health and Social Services under the office of the commissioner to Behavioral Health. Since that time they have worked closely with the Council to improve alignment and coordination of activities. They have worked in partnership with the Council relative to statewide planning, outreach, research and the evaluation process, and support the extension and the two recommendations made by Legislative Audit. She noted that all 15 member seats will be filled within two weeks, which will help with the stability and work of the Council.

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SENATOR ELLIS asked if DHSS has talked to the Governor's Office of Boards and Commissions about the difficulties they've had in filling positions on the Council.

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MS. STONE said there has been discussion and some ideas have been considered.

SENATOR ELLIS said it would probably help the committee if those two aspects of the executive branch were in alignment regarding their recommendations to the committee.

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SENATOR PASKVAN asked if there was any difficulty with the disclosure requirements in filling positions on the Council.

MS. STONE said she did not believe disclosure was a problem, but the narrow definitions of the some of the seats did make it difficult.

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CHAIR DAVIS asked for a motion to put the bill before them officially.

[1:51:42 PM](#)

SENATOR PASKVAN moved to adopt SB 35, Version A, as the committee's working copy.

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SENATOR DAVIS asked for further testimony. Hearing none, she closed discussion on SB 35 and said she would bring it back in a couple of weeks.

CHAIR DAVIS said this is a good time to discuss what the members want out of this meeting and hope to accomplish during the 90 day session. She reiterated that they will have no Friday meetings until it is necessary due to the volume of bills.

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As there were no comments, the Chair introduced her new staffer, Lynda Zaugg, and announced that the Taylor Foundation would offer a brief, unofficial overview of the Taylor Plan after the meeting adjourned.

[1:55:42 PM.](#)

CHAIR DAVIS adjourned the meeting at 1:55:42 p.m.