

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 19, 2009

9:01 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Linda Menard, Chair  
Senator Kevin Meyer, Vice Chair  
Senator Hollis French  
Senator Joe Paskvan

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Albert Kookesh

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 69

"An Act reestablishing the Alaska Commission on the Status of Women; and relating to the purpose and powers of the Alaska Human Relations Commission."

MOVED CSSB 69(STA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL NO. 78

"An Act relating to the powers and duties of the legislative audit division."

MOVED CSSB 78(STA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 63(FIN)

"An Act relating to the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault."

MOVED SCS CSHB 63(STA) OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 69

SHORT TITLE: COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) DAVIS

01/21/09	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/21/09	(S)	STA, FIN
03/17/09	(S)	STA AT 9:00 AM BELTZ 211
03/17/09	(S)	Bill Postponed To 3/19/09

BILL: SB 78

SHORT TITLE: LEGISLATIVE AUDIT DIVISION POWERS

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) DYSON

01/26/09 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/26/09 (S) STA, FIN  
03/17/09 (S) STA AT 9:00 AM BELTZ 211  
03/17/09 (S) Heard & Held  
03/17/09 (S) MINUTE(STA)

BILL: HB 63

SHORT TITLE: COUNCIL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: MEMBERS, STAFF  
SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) FAIRCLOUGH, HOLMES, COGHILL,  
WILSON

01/20/09 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/20/09 (H) STA, FIN  
01/20/09 (H) PROFILE RELEASED 1/16/09  
02/12/09 (H) STA AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106  
02/12/09 (H) Moved CSHB 63(STA) Out of Committee  
02/12/09 (H) MINUTE(STA)  
02/13/09 (H) DP: JOHNSON, GATTO, SEATON, GRUENBERG,  
WILSON, PETERSEN, LYNN  
02/13/09 (H) STA RPT CS(STA) 7DP  
02/26/09 (H) FIN AT 1:30 PM HOUSE FINANCE 519  
02/26/09 (H) Moved CSHB 63(FIN) Out of Committee  
02/26/09 (H) MINUTE(FIN)  
02/27/09 (H) DP: THOMAS, GARA, CRAWFORD, JOULE,  
AUSTERMAN, KELLY, FAIRCLOUGH, SALMON,  
STOLTZE  
02/27/09 (H) FIN RPT CS(FIN) 9DP  
03/02/09 (H) VERSION: CSHB 63(FIN)  
03/02/09 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)  
03/09/09 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
03/09/09 (S) STA, FIN  
03/17/09 (S) STA AT 9:00 AM BELTZ 211  
03/17/09 (S) Heard & Held  
03/17/09 (S) MINUTE(STA)

**WITNESS REGISTER**

SENATOR BETTYE DAVIS  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented SB 69 as sponsor.

LYNDA ZAUGG, Staff  
to Senator Davis  
Alaska State Legislature

Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented SB 69.

ARLISS STURGULEWSKI, Former Alaska State Senator  
Anchorage AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke in support of SB 69.

CAREN ROBINSON, Lobbyist  
Alaska Women's Lobby  
Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke in support of SB 69.

HATTIE GARDNER, President  
Alaska Federation of Business and Professional Women  
Anchorage AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke in support of SB 69.

ANNABELLE STEVENS, Member  
Alaska Federation of Business and Professional Women  
Anchorage AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke in support of SB 69.

RAMONA DUBY, Member  
Alaska Federation of Business and Professional Women  
Anchorage AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke in support of SB 69.

JANE ANGVIK, Board Member  
Alaska Girl Scouts and Alaska Women's Political Caucus  
Anchorage AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke in support of SB 69.

BRITTANY GOODNIGHT, Board Member  
Alaska Women's Political Caucus  
Anchorage AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke in support of SB 69.

LATANYA SEMONES  
Fairbanks AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke in support of SB 69.

KATHERINE FOREST  
Anchorage AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke in support of SB 69.

CLOVER SIMON, Alaska Vice President  
Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest

Anchorage AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke in support of SB 69.

SENATOR FRED DYSON

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented SB 78.

PAT DAVIDSON, Auditor

Division of Legislative Audit

Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions about SB 78.

REPRESENTATIVE ANNA FAIRCLOUGH

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 63.

FATE PUTMAN, Assistant Business Manager

Alaska State Employees Association

Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke in support of HB 63.

CHRIS ASHENBRENNER, Executive Director

Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Juneau AK

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Spoke in support of HB 63.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[9:01:11 AM](#)

**CHAIR LINDA MENARD** called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. Senators Paskvan, French, and Menard were present at the call to order. Senator Meyer arrived shortly thereafter.

#### **SB 69-COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

CHAIR MENARD announced the consideration of SB 69.

[9:02:47 AM](#)

SENATOR BETTYE DAVIS, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor, said the Commission on the Status of Women functioned well for quite awhile, but it went away once it was combined with another commission that never really got funded. Many women asked her to reestablish it.

CHAIR MENARD asked what commission it was combined with.

9:03:44 AM

LYNDA ZAUGG, Staff to Senator Davis, Alaska State Legislature, said it was the Alaska Human Relations Commission. She read the following sponsor statement:

It is time to once again acknowledge the contributions of women across Alaska. It is time to re-establish the Commission on the Status of Women.

In 1976 the legislature established the first Commission on the Status of Women to address the unique needs of Alaska's women and children. The Commission was tasked with implementing the recommendations contained in the preliminary study on the status of women. The Commission was to improve the status of women in Alaska through research and making and implementing additional recommendations on the opportunities, needs, problems, and contributions of women. The improvements made by the commission were to include, but not limited to, the areas of education, homemaking, civil & legal rights, labor, and employment. The Women's Commission was merged with Alaska Human Relations Commission in 1993, which continues to exist in state statute but has never been funded and was declared inactive in 1996.

Since 1993, the problems identified by the Commission on the Status of Women have continued to exist with minimal change and with ongoing negative impacts for Alaskan women and their families. Women represent half of our state, half of our work force, and consequently half of our ability. In order for us to continue to explore and develop our state to its full potential we must improve the opportunities for all citizens, including women.

In Alaska, women in government still earn only 80 percent of the income of men, while in the private sector women earn 62.4 percent of men. Women and children continue to be the most common victims of domestic abuse. Women in Alaska lead the nation as victims of sexual assaults. We have a struggling foster child system. Our high school students, both male and female, drop out at alarming rates. We have one of the lowest percentages of students entering and completing higher education programs. We have a significant economic divide between our urban and rural communities which negatively impacts all of us.

These are just a few of the issues facing women and children in our state that need to be addressed.

Reestablishing the Commission on the Status of Women is an excellent way to focus attention on the major issues that impact women and children.

The purpose of the commission would be to improve the status of women by conducting research, as well as serve as a referral service for information and education to help women avail themselves of existing resources to meet their needs. Additionally, the commission would make and implement recommendations on the opportunities, needs, problems, and contributions of women in the areas of education, homemaking, civil and legal rights, and labor and employment.

Alaska, with its unique culture, history, and challenges combined with its large size and small population, calls for innovative forward thinking to deal with many of the difficult issues facing Alaskan women and their families. The creation of a Commission on the Status of Women will once again focus the attention of Alaskans on these critical issues.

[9:07:13 AM](#)

ARLISS STURGULEWSKI, Former Alaska State Senator, Anchorage, said she is affiliated with many groups. She was a senator in the 1980s when the commission was very active, and she was sad to see its demise. It is critical that it be reestablished. This is an important time. Research is needed in domestic violence, single head of household families, shelter, the increasing and shameful dropout rates, the need for quality foster care, and the need for referral services to assist women in gaining information and education. The non-profit YWCA worked with the University of Alaska Anchorage to provide scholarships for 10 women who were the single heads of household. It was a major cooperative effort and showed what can be done when people work together. The commission is needed to help women, children, and families. It is a crime that the commission disintegrated.

[9:10:24 AM](#)

CHAIR MENARD thanked Ms. Sturgulewski for her endless hard work.

CAREN ROBINSON, Lobbyist, Alaska Women's Lobby, Juneau, said the women's lobby is a statewide steering committee in Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Juneau. Its mission is to defend and advance the rights and the needs of women, children, and families in Alaska. The lobby fully supports re-establishing the women's commission. It is Alaska's 50-year anniversary, and re-

establishing the commission is a wise investment that can move us forward in the next 50 years. Women have made significant economic, political, and social advances, but women are far from enjoying gender equity. Women earn less than men, are seriously underrepresented in political offices, and make up a disproportionate share of people in poverty. Even in areas that have seen significant advances in women's status, rates of progress are very slow. At the rate of progress of the past 10 years, women will not meet wage parity for more than 50 years. If women represented in Congress changes at the rate it did in the 1990s, it will take more than a century to achieve equity in political representation. To make significant progress, policy researchers and advocates need reliable data about women.

[9:13:01 AM](#)

MS. ROBINSON said the first Alaska Women's Commission initiated a series of reports on the status of women in Alaska. It was one of the most valuable things it did in advancing the rights of women. The work of the commission addressed domestic violence, welfare reform, and other issues. The reports are needed today to inform citizens about the progress of women in Alaska related to women in other states, to men, and to the whole nation. The commission can analyze and disseminate information, provide baseline measures, and most importantly, identify measures and solutions to equality barriers. "We've come a long way." Women in Alaska and the U.S. have seen important changes in their lives and their access to political, economic, and social rights. There is still more to do. Alaska women could benefit from stronger enforcement of equal opportunity laws, better political representation, adequate and affordable childcare, stronger poverty reduction programs, and other policies. A women's commission would provide the focus and direction to achieve these goals. She noted her collection of historical booklets from the commission. Joan Katz wrote the first status report. Later work was done by the last commissioner and director Ruth Lister. She understood women's problems. She wrote a report about young women dropping out of school, and her recommendations likely have not been followed.

[9:15:45 AM](#)

MS. ROBINSON said she also wrote about teen pregnancy and how to educate young men. The Women's Legal Rights Handbook was used the most, and it needs to be updated.

[9:16:26 AM](#)

HATTIE GARDNER, President, Alaska Federation of Business and Professional Women, Anchorage, said the federation was founded

in 1919 and chartered in Alaska in 1945. There are three local chapters in Alaska. The national federation concentrates on fair pay and getting veteran women back into work. It works with AARP on divided-we-fall health issues and the American Heart Association on reporting heart health. The local federation concentrates on scholarships for young women and sometimes men, global warming, individual development for women, and training for young women and women who head the household. Reinstating this commission is important to the federation. The statistics will be used to plan programs to supply information to the national group. The group wants a place to draw statistics from for things like domestic violence and children in need.

[9:19:02 AM](#)

ANNABELLE STEVENS, Member, Federation of Business and Professional Women, Anchorage, said she has been coming to Juneau for over 35 years on different issues, but reestablishing the women's commission is one of the most important. It is "vital to the civil rights, the labor, the employment, equal pay of women, and I hesitate to say homemaking because 100 years ago women were homemakers." Now they are bread winners, and it is important to show how much women do. "Behind every successful man is a woman that has given him a hand up."

[9:20:22 AM](#)

RAMONA DUBY, Member, Federation of Business and Professional Women, Anchorage, said she supports the re-establishment of the women's commission and she echoes every comment made by Ms. Sturgulewski. She got involved in public policy at the women's commission in the 1980s. It assisted her with a legal issue against a state nonprofit. She wants more meat in the commission and have it report to the legislature or governor. It is one thing to get this vitally needed information, but she would like to see the information put to use.

[9:22:13 AM](#)

JANE ANGVIK, Member, Alaska Girl Scouts, Alaska Women's Political Caucus, Anchorage, said she has been involved in women's issues for many years. She supports SB 69 because it will do research to assist women in economic situations. Alaska women are underpaid relative to men. It is important to focus on women's capacity to be able to support themselves and their families, and the women's commission can do research and make recommendations on that. The previous commission developed a body of research that informed citizens and legislators.

[9:23:54 AM](#)

BRITTANY GOODNIGHT, Member, Alaska Women's Political Caucus board, Anchorage, said she is a young professional, and she is in Juneau for the Women's Summit. She was born and raised in Chugiak. As a young woman, she is shocked that this commission doesn't exist. It could guide the legislature and governor in the advancement for women in all kinds of realms. It is important to the state, her future, and her children's future.

LATANYA SEMONES, Fairbanks, said she is in Juneau for the Women's Summit, and she echoes what everyone has said. She is a young Native woman. Re-establishing the commission would offer a huge opportunity for her aunts, sisters, brothers, grandmothers, and all her family in rural Alaska.

KATHERINE FOREST, Anchorage, said she was born and raised in Anchorage and is from a big Hispanic family. She agrees with all the previous testimony.

[9:26:17 AM](#)

CLOVER SIMON, Alaska Vice President, Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest, Anchorage, said her organization serves women and children and employs mostly women. Her staff are often single mothers. "Having the information out there to legislators about the importance of bringing women up, I think is paramount to the future of our state." Improving the lives of women improves the lives of everyone in the community, especially children. She wants the bill to move forward.

[9:27:27 AM](#)

SENATOR MEYER said a witness said that the commission should be implemented by the governor or legislator. Page 4 has the commission preparing a report and will provide the governor with copies of the report. He asked that the legislature be included.

SENATOR DAVIS said the last commission reported directly to the governor. It can report to the legislature, but the closer to the legislature and the governor the better. She will consider any recommendation that makes the bill stronger.

SENATOR MEYER said it is fine for the report to go to the governor, as long as the legislature is kept informed.

SENATOR DAVIS said that can be addressed in the bill if the committee wants.

SENATOR MEYER said a simple amendment can do that.

[9:29:21 AM](#)

CHAIR MENARD noted the fiscal note of \$505,000.

SENATOR DAVIS said that is what came back to her, and it establishes the same positions from the old commission, including executive director and staff. The human relations commission was never funded. The commission went away in 1993.

CHAIR MENARD asked if other states have similar commissions.

SENATOR DAVIS said all other states have them in various forms.

SENATOR FRENCH said Senator Meyer made a good suggestion, so he moved Amendment 1, as follows: Page 4, line 5, after "governor" insert "and the legislature", and strike all of the words on line 6. Hearing no objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

SENATOR FRENCH moved to report SB 69, as amended, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s). There being no objection, CSSB 69 (STA) passed out of committee.

**SB 78-LEGISLATIVE AUDIT DIVISION POWERS**

[9:34:10 AM](#)

CHAIR MENARD announced the consideration of SB 78.

SENATOR FRENCH moved to adopt the committee substitute (CS) to SB 78, labeled 26-LS0194\S, as a working document. Hearing no objection, version S was before the committee.

[9:35:16 AM](#)

SENATOR FRED DYSON, Alaska State Legislature, said he is the prime sponsor of SB 78. He said Senator French has done some good work, but he would like to suggest minor changes in the CS. He can put them all together next week or in the next committee.

CHAIR MENARD said she would like to move the bill.

SENATOR MEYER asked if the auditor supports the changes.

PAT DAVIDSON, Auditor, Division of Legislative Audit, Juneau, said the last clause in the new section 11 limits the audit to only the financial records of an organization. It will constrain legislators to only ask for financial audits. They won't be able to ask for performance-oriented audits. For example, the state runs a training program through the Department of Labor and gives money to various organizations. If the legislature wanted

to know how successful those programs were, the auditors would not be able to measure that by looking at financial records. "To get the broadest type of information to the legislature, you may want to consider taking that portion out." That would give auditors access to records that were generated through the use of state money or federal money flowing through the state and perform a wider breadth of audits.

[9:37:59 AM](#)

SENATOR MEYER said he agrees. He asked about "may" instead of "shall" on number 11.

MS. DAVIDSON said she is not sure. "It's the second time the word 'may' has shown up." She hasn't spoken to the drafter on why it is there. Is it giving the authority to her to say no to a committee audit request?

SENATOR FRENCH suggested dropping the second clause in subsection 11. He moved Amendment 1 as follows: Page 2, line 27, after the word "committee", add a period and strike the rest. Hearing no objection, Amendment 1 passed.

[9:39:36 AM](#)

SENATOR MEYER moved to report the CS to SB 78 labeled, 26-LS0194\S, as amended, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s). There being no objection, CSSB 78(STA) moved out of committee.

[9:40:39 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

**HB 63-COUNCIL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: MEMBERS, STAFF**

[9:42:55 AM](#)

CHAIR MENARD announced the consideration of CSHB 63(FIN).

REPRESENTATIVE ANNA FAIRCLOUGH, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of HB 63, said several issues were raised at the last committee meeting regarding taking personnel from an exempt status to a nonexempt status with union representation. Representative Fairclough didn't know if the change in health insurance would require duplicate deductibles and she didn't know if they would lose money, but she was told that there would be a pay reduction by moving to the nonexempt status. There were a variety of other issues. She has been assured by the administration that all of the issues have been taken care of through an amendment.

[9:44:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FAIRCLOUGH said if this amendment is adopted, the pay of the six staff would stay the same as they cross over into the classified position. It would happen immediately on the effective date, which will be simultaneous with when health care coverage changes, so there is no issue of past deductibles or a pre-exemption problem.

SENATOR MEYER moved Amendment 1, labeled: 26-LS0138\T.1, as follows:

Page 2, lines 29 - 30:

Delete "is [AND STAFF ARE] in the exempt service under AS 39.25.110 and staff members are in the classified service under AS 39.25.100"

Insert "and staff are in the exempt service under AS 39.25.110"

Page 4, lines 11 - 13:

Delete all material.

Renumber the following bill section accordingly.

Hearing no objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[9:45:39 AM](#)

FATE PUTMAN, Assistant Business Manager, Alaska State Employees Association (ASEA), Juneau, said his union will represent these employees once they return to classified service. The union is not the health insurer; the health trust is a stand-alone entity. He was told that as employees move from select benefits to the health trust, they will receive a COBRA notice and a certificate of credible coverage. The certificate will eliminate the waiting period for a pre-existing condition. They will immediately get health coverage without any loss of deductibles or co-pay, since they will transfer on July 1, which is the end of the plan year. ASEA has no objection to moving employees from exempt status to classified status. It has no objection to not using the recruitment process in this one case.

SENATOR FRENCH said the certificate is very important. It covers pre-existing conditions. It is a great solution.

CHAIR MENARD said the sponsor has worked hard on this.

[9:48:08 AM](#)

CHRIS ASHENBRENNER, Executive Director, Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Juneau, said the council strongly supports this bill. It will strengthen the council. "The addition of corrections, the addition of a rural public member, the extension of terms they serve will make it stronger and enhance their ability to fight these crimes." She is grateful to the sponsor. This is a group of dedicated hardworking staff, and this gives them some protection.

[9:49:13 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

SENATOR FRENCH moved to report CSHB 63(FIN), as amended, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s). There being no objection, SCS CSHB 63(STA) moved out of committee.

[9:50:29 AM](#)

CHAIR MENARD adjourned the Senate State Affairs meeting at 9:50 a.m.