

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE

April 14, 2011

8:52 a.m.

[8:52:33 AM](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Stoltze called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 8:52 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Bill Stoltze, Co-Chair
Representative Bill Thomas Jr., Co-Chair
Representative Anna Fairclough, Vice-Chair
Representative Mia Costello
Representative Mike Doogan
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Representative Les Gara
Representative David Guttenberg
Representative Reggie Joule
Representative Mark Neuman
Representative Tammie Wilson

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Representative Cathy Munoz, Sponsor; Jeff Ottesen, Director, Program Development, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; Representative Chris Tuck, Sponsor; Mark Lewis, Director, Division of Administrative Services, Department of Education and Early Development.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

David Levie, Executive Director, Alaska Mobility Coalition; Camille Ferguson, Economic Development Director, Sitka Tribe of Alaska; Debi Baldwin, Child Development Division Director, RurAL CAP.

SUMMARY

HB 49 EARLY CHILDHOOD ED: PARENTS AS TEACHERS

HB 49 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 131 COMMUNITY AND TRANSPORTATION ADV. BOARD

CSHB 131(TRA) was REPORTED out of Committee with a "do pass" recommendation and with attached new fiscal impact note by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

SB 58 INCREASING NUMBER OF SUPERIOR CT JUDGES

SB 58 was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

CSSB 84(FIN)

VOC ED & BASIC FUNDING/TAX CREDITS

CSSB 84(FIN) was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

SB 108 SPC. STEPHEN "MAX" CAVANAUGH OVERPASS

SB 108 was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

#hb131

HOUSE BILL NO. 131

"An Act establishing the Alaska Community and Public Transportation Advisory Board and relating to a long-range community and public transportation plan; and providing for an effective date."

[8:52:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CATHY MUNOZ, SPONSOR, explained the legislation. House Bill 131 established a permanent task force coordinating community based transportation. The task force was first established by Governor Palin and continued by Governor Parnell. The task force would become a permanent advisory board. The task force would address public and community transportation needs and serve people with specialized travel requirements, such as seniors, low income individuals, the transit dependent and persons with disabilities. She listed the groups supporting the legislation: the Alaska Mobility Coalition, the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, Advisory

Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, the Alaska Commission on Aging, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Alaska Brain Injury Network, and the Alaska Suicide Prevention Council. She added that the board would consist of 13 members. The fiscal note totaled \$110 thousand per fiscal year comprised of: \$90 thousand in federal funds, \$10 thousand state match, and \$10 thousand in general fund money from the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

Co-Chair Stoltze OPENED public testimony.

DAVID LEVIE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALASKA MOBILITY COALITION (via teleconference), spoke in support of the HB 131. He described his organization. The Alaska Mobility Coalition (AMC) was a statewide private non-profit that represented and advocated for community transportation needs. The coalition felt that the legislation was a great step towards coordinating transportation statewide. He pointed out that transportation in Alaska was unique, and the task force was a first step in state involvement.

[8:56:56 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stoltze remarked that the task force was funded by an 80 percent to 20 percent match of federal and state funds. He warned that federal funds were facing budget cuts. He qualified that his support of the legislation was based on the large federal match.

Mr. Levie recognized the concern. He was informed that support for community and public transportation from the federal government would continue.

Representative Gara acknowledged Mr. Levie's hard work on providing transportation for people with disabilities and other transportation challenges.

Representative Munoz noted that the legislation provided a sunset date of December 31, 2016.

JEFF OTTESEN, DIRECTOR, PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES, spoke in support of HB 131. He defined coordinated transportation. He informed the committee that approximately 60 federal programs funded community transportation; the dollars flow through state government to non-profits and local government to deliver the services. The lack of coordination resulted in multiple

individualized service providers without integration to share services. The result was a dysfunctional, unorganized system. Coordinated transportation would integrate the services at the local level to create efficient use of the resources. The efficiencies would save federal and state money and provide improved service for Alaskans.

[9:00:37 AM](#)

Mr. Ottesen furthered that it was difficult for the various state and local entities and non-profits to coordinate and "work across their natural boundaries". He believed that a board was necessary to achieve coordinated community transportation services. He explained that a coordinating body would break down barriers and make community transportation more practical. He exemplified a story from task force public testimony. He related that an elderly woman from rural Alaska traveled to Anchorage for medical purposes. She was wheelchair bound and was unable to obtain community transport. She had to travel to her destinations by ambulance. Each ambulance trip cost over \$1 thousand. He surmised that coordinated transport provided a notable opportunity for savings.

CAMILLE FERGUSON, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, SITKA TRIBE OF ALASKA (via teleconference), testified in support of the legislation. She revealed that she served on the transportation taskforce and oversaw a coordinated public transportation operation in Sitka. She related that the taskforce was examining community need, available resources, and identifying the barriers to coordination. She discovered much unmet need. She believed the taskforce was very important to the entire state. A permanent taskforce could implement the work the taskforce accomplished. She felt all special needs should be analyzed and carefully considered.

[9:04:58 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stoltze CLOSED public testimony.

Co-Chair Thomas MOVED to report CSHB 131(TRA) out of Committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal note. There being NO OBJECTION, it was so ordered.

CSHB 131(TRA)was REPORTED out of Committee with a "do pass" recommendation and with attached new fiscal impact note by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

9:06:56 AM

AT EASE

9:08:08 AM

RECONVENED

#hb49

HOUSE BILL NO. 49

"An Act establishing in the Department of Education and Early Development a voluntary parent and early childhood education program for pre-elementary aged children."

9:08:12 AM

REPRESENTATIVE CHRIS TUCK, SPONSOR, explained the legislation. He believed that quality education remained a challenge in the state. The state spent ample resources on remedial and special education and despite the effort the educational system was not producing results. He felt that a better method to provide students real educational opportunities and a new paradigm for learning was needed. He voiced that parents are a child's first and most important teachers. Research has proven that parental involvement in a child's early years was critical for development and success in school.

Representative Tuck expounded that HB 49 was an early learning model to increase school readiness, family involvement, and create a culture of learning in Alaskan communities. The legislation allowed the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to offer the "successful" Parents as Teachers early childhood learning system as an education option for families with children ages 0 to 5. He discussed the Parents as Teachers program. The program was completely voluntary. He related that the program succeeded by engaging families and communities, explaining children's brain development and how to create an appropriate learning environment. Parents as Teachers focused on how children learn not what they learn, and blended with any educational philosophy or language. The program increased school readiness and educational success into adulthood. The program employed a research based curriculum and assisted in early detection of impairments. Early detection and resolution provided cost savings by avoiding special and remedial education later on. He reported that estimated costs of a statewide program were

\$4 million annually; 80 percent of the funding was directed to the staff working with families.

9:11:59 AM

DEBI BALDWIN, CHILD DEVELOPMENT DIVISION DIRECTOR, RURAL CAP (via teleconference), testified in support of the legislation. She believed in increased opportunity for parental involvement in a child's education. Well-informed parents that employed positive parental practices advocated and lead their child's educational experience, which resulted in success. The Parents as Teachers program was a key to school readiness. The legislation would provide increased access to the program.

9:14:19 AM

AT EASE

9:14:49 AM

RECONVENED

MARK LEWIS, DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT, testified that the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) considered HB 131 a positive component to its efforts towards early childhood education and early learning coordination. He relayed that any early learning program approved by the legislature would be examined in the context of statewide budget priorities. The governor's budget included the pre-K pilot program and additional \$ 600 thousand in the early learning component: \$300 thousand appropriated for Best Beginnings and the remainder was appropriated to Rural Cap to support early learning in Tok, Seward, Stebbins, and Kodiak.

Co-Chair Stoltze wondered what would happen to the smaller programs if a holistic approach to early learning was adopted. Mr. Lewis answered that HB 131 would provide a holistic solution to this type of approach to early learning. He noted that other programs would culminate in the event of a comprehensive early education system in the state.

9:18:43 AM

Representative Neuman related personal experience with early learning as a parent. He asked how the funding would function and who would receive the funds. Mr. Lewis

understood that DEED would develop a grant application and review process so that entities could participate. He did not know whether a business license would be required.

Representative Neuman asked for clarification on how the program operated. Mr. Lewis answered that the grant could pay for materials, teachers, and coordinators. He believed in a collaborative model for early education and that each program would be unique to the community it served .

Representative Neuman asked whether the program would reimburse existing programs such as Head Start.

[9:22:42 AM](#)

Mr. Lewis answered that the program would not reimburse existing programs but provide support to parents willing to participate in the program and implement early learning guidelines per the department. The grant would provide the tools to make early learning effective.

Representative Gara thought that Parents as Teachers was the least expensive way to provide early education. He did not believe the model would fit families with both parents working. He asked whether the legislation would offer an option but not the sole option for pre-K. Mr. Lewis agreed and stated that different models of Pre-K would exist. He pointed out that the cost of Parent as Teachers was per family. Multiple children in the same household would benefit from the base cost of \$4 thousand per family.

Representative Gara understood that a parent could decide to teach pre-K at home. The parent would meet with a coordinator to obtain the materials and training to teach the child. He asked if that was an accurate description of how the program worked. Mr. Lewis agreed.

Co-Chair Thomas spoke in support of the program. He believed Parents as Teachers was a successful program. He listed multiple early childhood educational programs such as Head Start. He asked whether other early education programs showed measurable success in terms of graduation rates. Mr. Lewis answered that it will take a coordinated effort by DEED to collect the data. The programs were supposed to be research-based. Future funding decisions could be based on results. The department would compare the variety of early education models.

[9:28:28 AM](#)

Co-Chair Thomas referred to testimony and thought part of the problem was the lack of DEED data and progress reports on early education. He noted DEED did not know how many years were necessary for Pre-K. It was difficult for the legislature to make decisions without data. He wanted to see a report on the success of pre-K programs. Mr. Lewis apologized for the lack of data and agreed that the department could do a better job at presenting the information required. He agreed to provide the information.

Co-Chair Thomas relayed that no one from the villages in his district reported successes in pre-K programs.

Representative Wilson referenced data from Legislative Research Services on early childhood education. The data did not include \$8 million that the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) spent on early intervention. She asked whether the DEED report would include duplication of services to children. Mr. Lewis replied in the affirmative. He reported that DEED collaborated with DHSS and all of the early learning programs had to be considered. He did not want to duplicate services between agencies.

[9:32:33 AM](#)

Mr. Lewis furthered that a comprehensive system that included data collection and accurate reporting was essential for decision making. Representative Wilson wanted a coordinated effort to determine what programs work.

Representative Joule agreed that providing requested information to the legislature was very important. He believed that decisions were influenced by the lack of information. He encouraged the department to notify legislators when information was distributed. He cited the early education programs, Parents as Teachers and Best Beginnings. He liked the program being discussed. He shared concerns that pre-K children were "turned over" in programs with questionable performance. He characterized the system as "Give your kids to the government at an earlier age and we will raise them for you." He wondered what happened to the parent's responsibilities. When parents become teachers they instill the value of education in their children. The parents learn that their child's ability to learn was

limitless. He opined that Best Beginnings in combination with Parents as Teachers would deliver a comprehensive public private model. He supported a system where parents were involved early in children's education and the community reinforced the family involvement.

9:37:10 AM

Representative Joule added that the best system was when the public and private entities worked together.

Representative Costello spoke in support of the legislation. She believed the program would empower parents in the development of their children. She pointed to research about children's brain development and growth from birth to age three. She thought the program would lay a positive foundation for the formative years. She like the community based nature of the program. She referred to research that listed the programs measured success. Representative Costello agreed with Representative Joule's concerns about government taking over the role of parents. She did not think the program would do that.

Representative Edgmon spoke in support of the bill. He reported experience on the House Education Committee that taught him the value of early education. He felt that the program represented "spending on the front end to avoid spending on the back end." He noted the amount spent on the Department of Corrections (\$269 million in general funds) in the state and wondered how that could be mitigated by early education. He complimented the department on their efforts in early education but did not think it was enough.

9:41:57 AM

Co-Chair Stoltze did not believe that the issues with corrections and education should be linked. He felt it distorted both debates.

Representative Tuck pointed out that Parents as Teachers had been in Alaska for 18 years, and that studies showed its success. The evidence demonstrated that the program kept parents engaged in their child's education over the years. He spoke to challenges to get parents more engaged. The earlier parents learn to engage resulted in more successful outcomes. He noted the flexibility of the program. He listed that public schools, non-profits, native

associations, tribal council, and military bases were using the program.

[9:45:35 AM](#)

Representative Tuck stated that the program was the most cost effective way to deliver early education in the state due to the geographic realities. Co-Chair Stoltze voiced that some parents do not want children assimilated at an earlier age and appreciated the emphasis on the voluntary nature of the program.

Representative Tuck commented that often parents do not want take their children to a facility. He emphasized that the program had to be voluntary or the program would fail. Co-Chair Stoltze asserted that "charter schools were the ultimate parental involvement model" that was hugely successful.

[9:48:44 AM](#)

Representative Tuck remarked that the charter school parents were involved parents. He anticipated that the program would foster the growth of charter schools.

Representative Neuman stated that he liked the concept. He reported that he was a home school parent. He reported that 13,500 school children or 10 percent of the student population were home schooled in Alaska, by far the most in the country. He thought Alaska had a very transitional student body, migrating from school to school. He thought the program could set up a structure so that parent could move with the family as they transition from one community to another.

Representative Tuck agreed. He explained that parents were required to meet once each month with other families in the program. The requirement was especially helpful on military bases to help ease transitions.

HB 49 was HEARD and HELD in Committee for further consideration.

[9:52:22 AM](#)

AT EASE

[9:52:53 AM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Stoltze

#sb58

SENATE BILL NO. 58

"An Act increasing the number of superior court judges designated for the third judicial district; and providing for an effective date."

SB 58 was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

#sb84

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 84(FIN)

"An Act relating to funding for high school vocational and technical instruction as a component of funding for public schools; relating to the base student allocation; relating to education tax credits; providing for an effective date by amending the effective date in sec. 57, ch. 92, SLA 2010; and providing for an effective date."

CSSB 84(FIN) was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

#sb108

SENATE BILL NO. 108

"An Act naming the Dowling Road overpass at milepost 123.7 on the New Seward Highway the Spc. Stephen "Max" Cavanaugh, Jr., Memorial Overpass."

SB 108 was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

[9:53:50 AM](#)

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ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:53 AM.