

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
January 30, 2012
9:02 a.m.

9:02:58 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Stedman called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair
Senator Dennis Egan
Senator Donny Olson
Senator Joe Thomas

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Lesil McGuire, Vice-Chair
Senator Lyman Hoffman, Co-Chair
Senator Johnny Ellis

ALSO PRESENT

Thomas Obermeyer, Staff, Senator Bettye Davis; Senator Bettye Davis; Kate Burkhart, Executive Director, Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; Les Morse, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development; Katya Wassillie, Intern, Senator Bettye Davis

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Anne Kilkenny, Matsu; James Biela, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Bethel; Carol Waters, Alaska Association of Student Governments, Anchorage; Sonnie Anderson, Klawok Schools; Clark Flatt, President and CEO of the Jason Foundation, Nashville, Tennessee; Sharin Strutznorton, American Society of Suicide Prevention, Homer; Donna Bartman, Alaska Association of Student Governments, Manokotak; Ann Schaack, North Star, Anchorage; Madison Manning, Alaska Association of Student Governments, Port Heiden; Byron Charles, Tribal Member of Tlingit and Haida, Ketchikan

SUMMARY

SB 9 RAISE COMP. SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AGE/TRUANCY

SB 9 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 137 SUICIDE AWARENESS & PREVENTION TRAINING

SB 137 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SCR 2 UNIFORM RULES: PRESIDING OFFICER PRO TEM

SCR 2 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#sb9

SENATE BILL NO. 9

"An Act relating to compulsory school attendance; and relating to the crime of contributing to the delinquency of a minor."

9:04:13 AM

THOMAS OBERMEYER, STAFF, SENATOR BETTYE DAVIS, explained SB 9. He referred to the Sponsor Statement (copy on file). He stated that SB 9 would change the Alaska compulsory school attendance ages from 7-16 to 6-18. At the same time, it necessarily amends the criminal statute of contributing to the delinquency of a minor from the maximum age of 16 to 18. The legislative intent of the bill was to require all students to start school earlier when their brains are growing and developing at a dramatic rate from birth to age seven, and to stay in school long enough to graduate. The bill allowed earlier identification of children with learning disabilities and more time to take successful corrective action. The bill would not preclude parents from homeschooling children, using charter or alternative school, or any other of the twelve enumerated exceptions to compulsory education under AS 14.30.010(b), including completion of grade 12 or graduation from a secondary school before age 18.

Mr. Obermeyer explained that the Alaska compulsory school age statute was out of date with modern educational practice and thinking. The law had not changed since

territorial days when few children attended school beyond eighth grade or bothered to graduate, because most jobs did not require much education. The majority of Alaskan students were currently in school by age six and many by the minimum age five. Head Start and prekindergarten programs were growing in popularity. The state already funded a pilot prekindergarten program and SB 6 proposed funding such a program statewide.

[9:09:56 AM](#)

Mr. Obermeyer explained the Sectional Summary (copy on file). He stated that Section 1 would raise the age from 16 to 18 for the crime of contributing to the delinquency of a minor for repeated absences from school. He explained that Section 2 would raise the compulsory school age from 16 to 18. He noted that Section 3 would amend an exception to the compulsory school attendance age to provide for graduation for a secondary school. He also referred to the high dropout rates in Alaska.

SENATOR BETTYE DAVIS, stressed the importance of students to attend school, and receive a high school diploma. She pointed out that students would not be required to stay in school until the age of eighteen.

Senator Thomas noted that there was a shift in the age of the workforce. He appreciated the change from 16 to 18. He queried the perspective of communities that have a focus on farming. Senator Davis could not comment on the farming communities.

Co-Chair Stedman noted the fiscal impact note from the Department of Education and Early Development.

[9:15:43 AM](#)

ANNE KILKENNY, MATSU (via teleconference), spoke in support of SB 9. She pointed out that her son had the desire to stop attending school at age 16. She felt that the bill was unenforceable without truancy officers, but would rather focus the money on teachers. She requested a tying the receipt of the Permanent Fund Dividend with school

Senator Olson queried the bill sponsor's perspective on tying the receipt of the Permanent Fund Dividend with school attendance. Senator Davis stated that she was open

to discussion. She pointed out that the state had not had truancy officers in many years. She noted that the bill would allow students to stay in school and encourage students to focus on graduation.

Senator Olson queried the recent success of the truancy officers in Juneau. Senator Davis stated that the district felt the truancy officer enforcement was beneficial, although employing truancy officers was ultimately too expensive.

Senator Bettye Davis thanked the committee for hearing the bill.

SB 9 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#sb137

SENATE BILL NO. 137

"An Act requiring suicide awareness and prevention training for certain school personnel."

[9:22:28 AM](#)

Senator Davis stated that SB 137 would allow teachers and school employees to obtain suicide prevention training.

Mr. Obermeyer explained the bill, and quoted the Sponsor Statement (copy on file). He stated that SB 137, short titled the Jason Flatt Act, required mandatory youth suicide awareness and prevention training approved by the Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development to each teacher, administrator, counselor, and specialist who was employed by a school district, regional educational attendance area, or department each year for services to students in grades 7 to 12. Training was important because suicide was the third leading cause of death for ages 10-24 and the number one cause of death for Alaskans under the age 50 years.

Mr. Obermeyer stated that awareness and education were the keys to prevention, and tying suicide prevention efforts into teacher training had proved very helpful in other states for reducing teen suicides. Most young people contemplating suicide showed clear warning signs prior to the attempt. It was imperative that educators know how to

recognize signs of at-risk youth and were prepared to intervene when they identified a problem.

Mr. Obermeyer explained that recognizing that Alaska had by far the highest rate of suicide per capita in the country, particularly among teens, young men, and Alaska Natives. The Alaska Mental Health Board and Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, in partnership with the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, the Alaska Association of Student Governments, the University of Alaska, and the Jason Foundation had established goals, training programs, and resources for teachers, coaches and staff in suicide prevention.

Mr. Obermeyer noted that the bill would create the needed hope, promise, and optimism to build healthy and appropriate relationships and behaviors. By requiring suicide prevention training for educators and school staff, the state of Alaska can ensure the youth at risk of suicide were more likely to be identified and receive help.

Mr. Obermeyer noted the fiscal note, and felt that some member fees could be eliminated through donations from foundations.

[9:28:39 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman noted the fiscal impact note from the Department of Education and Early Development. He requested a look at whether the fiscal note could be adjusted, per Mr. Obermeyer's observation.

Senator Davis remarked that there was some money in the governor's proposed budget that could possibly be used for the program.

JAMES BIELA, AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION, BETHEL (via teleconference), testified in support of SB 137. He stressed that teachers and school employees were the main contact for most students in Alaska.

[9:33:09 AM](#)

CAROL WATERS, ALASKA ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT GOVERNMENTS, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of SB 137. She felt that suicide prevention should be a focus when training educators and school employees. She shared an

anecdote regarding an associate who had numerous family members, friends, and acquaintances who had committed suicide.

SONNIE ANDERSON, KLAWOK SCHOOLS (via teleconference), testified in support of SB 137. She explained a resolution that had passed among the Alaska Association of Student Governments.

[9:37:54 AM](#)

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[9:38:31 AM](#)

RECONVENED

Ms. Anderson continued with her testimony. She furthered with her explanation of the resolution.

[9:40:23 AM](#)

CLARK FLATT, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE JASON FOUNDATION, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE (via teleconference), testified in support of SB 137. He noted that a similar bill had been passed in six other states. He pointed out that five states had passed the bill without a fiscal note. He stressed that educators could reduce the number of suicides. Education was a key to the foundation of preventing suicide.

SHARIN STRUTZNORTON, AMERICAN SOCIETY OF SUICIDE PREVENTION, HOMER (via teleconference), testified in support of SB 137. She stated that she had a history of suicide in her family.

[9:46:21 AM](#)

DONNA BARTMAN, ALASKA ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT GOVERNMENTS, MANOKOTAK (via teleconference), spoke in support of SB 137. She referred to the resolution for the Association of Student Governments, and stressed that it had passed with unanimous consent. She felt that the bill should focus on ages younger than seventh grade. She stressed that some elders in her Yupik culture were lacking in leadership, and even taking their own lives.

[9:50:42 AM](#)

ANN SCHAACK, NORTH STAR, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of SB 137.

MADISON MANNING, ALASKA ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT GOVERNMENTS, PORT HEIDEN (via teleconference), spoke in support of SB 137.

BYRON CHARLES, TRIBAL MEMBER OF TLINGIT AND HAIDA, KETCHIKAN (via teleconference), testified in support of SB 137. He explained that the tourism industry provided jobs, and that jobs were the key to preventing suicide.

KATE BURKHART, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, STATEWIDE SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL, testified in support of SB 137. She noted a letter of formal support from the Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training (copy on file).

[9:58:50 AM](#)

LES MORSE, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT, explained the fiscal note and cost of the implementing the bill. He pointed out that the funding behind the fiscal note would be the e-learning model and expertise. He stated that the fees would contribute to the e-learning module. He explained that there were some no-cost modules available from the Jason Foundation. He noted that there would be some updates required from year to year. He stressed that Department of Education and Early Development modules could track usage and effectiveness.

Co-Chair Stedman felt that the bill sponsor should focus on the issues that Mr. Morse addressed.

Senator Olson wondered if there were plans to focus on school districts with higher rates of suicide. Mr. Morse replied that the fiscal note from the Department of Education and Early Development would provide money for training for everyone, however there was money available in the Governor's budget from the Suicide Prevention Council. The funds needed to be examined to determine exactly how and where they would be distributed, without excluding any school district.

Senator Egan wondered if it was up to the individual school boards to make the training mandatory in the school districts. Mr. Morse replied that the districts would be required to implement the training based on a list of

trainings that would be approved by the Commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development.

In response to a question from Senator Thomas, Mr. Morse stated that there would be money from the governor's proposed budget that could be used for suicide prevention training. He pointed out that students had expressed concern and interest in piloting a program called Cognito, which was a suicide prevention tool.

[10:05:27 AM](#)

KATYA WASSILLIE, INTERN, SENATOR BETTYE DAVIS, stressed that the bill would particularly impact rural Alaska. She shared personal experiences with suicide.

Senator Olson felt that suicides were often committed because an older person commits suicide, so younger people were copying the older people. Ms. Wassillie felt that if there was more awareness at the school level, the indicator awareness could spread out throughout the community.

Senator Bettye Davis thanked the committee.

SB 137 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#scr2

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 2

Proposing amendments to the Uniform Rules of the Alaska State Legislature relating to the presiding officer pro tempore.

[10:10:57 AM](#)

Senator Bettye Davis explained that SCR 2 would create a permanent third position known as "Pro Tem" in leadership for temporary presiding officers who heretofore only presided over the first floor session of a legislature.

Mr. Obermeyer stated that the committee was looking at the Committee Substitute Senate Concurrent Resolution 2 (STA). He explained the Sponsor Statement (copy on file). He stated that the purpose of SCR 2 was to amend the uniform rules to increase the duties and responsibilities of temporary presiding officers and to allow more legislators

to function in leadership positions. He furthered that CS SCR 2 (STA) created a permanent third position in leadership for temporary presiding officers who heretofore only presided over the first floor session of a legislature until the chambers were organized and the permanent or regular presiding officers were seated. He noted that Sections 1-3 changed the nomenclature in titles to be consistent throughout the Uniform Rules. He stated that Section 4 amended Uniform Rule 4 by establishing that in the absence of both the regular presiding officer (Speaker of the House) and the absence of the majority leader, the presiding officer pro tempore previously elected in Uniform Rule 1(b) served as the presiding officer pro tempore. The result of the language amending Section 4 of SCR 2 was that the presiding officer pro tempore elected at the start of the first session of the legislature, in addition to the presiding officer pro tempore's duties set out in Uniform Rule 1(b), would continue for both sessions to serve as a "backup" in the absence of the regular presiding officer (Speaker of the House) and majority leader. Presiding officers pro tempore might also be assigned other duties consistent with the Uniform Rules. As presently provided in Rule 4, the regular presiding officers, majority leaders, and so the presiding officers pro tempore may relinquish the chair to any member.

Co-Chair Stedman noted an updated zero fiscal note from the Senate Finance Committee.

Senator Bettye Davis thanked the committee, and felt that the subject only pertained to the legislature.

SCR 2 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

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ADJOURNMENT

10:16:29 AM

The meeting was adjourned at 10:16 AM.