

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 20, 2015

1:38 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Lesil McGuire, Chair
Senator John Coghill, Vice Chair
Senator Mia Costello
Senator Bill Wielechowski

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Peter Micciche

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 43

"An Act relating to immunity for a fire department and employees or members of a fire department."

- MOVED CSSB 43(JUD) OUT OF COMMITTEE

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS

Alaska Police Standards Council

Rebecca Hamon
Gustaf Sandahl

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

State Board of Parole

Richard "Ole" Larson

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 43

SHORT TITLE: IMMUNITY FOR FIRE DEPT. & MEMBERS

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) COGHILL

02/06/15 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/06/15 (S) CRA, JUD
02/17/15 (S) CRA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
02/17/15 (S) Heard & Held
02/17/15 (S) MINUTE(CRA)
03/05/15 (S) CRA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/05/15 (S) Moved CSSB 43(CRA) Out of Committee
03/05/15 (S) MINUTE(CRA)
03/06/15 (S) CRA RPT CS 3DP SAME TITLE
03/06/15 (S) DP: BISHOP, EGAN, MACKINNON
03/16/15 (S) JUD AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/16/15 (S) Scheduled but Not Heard
03/18/15 (S) JUD AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
03/18/15 (S) Heard & Held
03/18/15 (S) MINUTE(JUD)
03/20/15 (S) JUD AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

RICHARD "OLE" LARSON, Appointee
State Board of Parole
Boston, Massachusetts

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee to the State Board of Parole.

GUSTAF SANDAHL, Chief
Kenai Police Department
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council.

REBECCA HAMON, Appointee
Alaska Police Standards Council
King Salmon, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council.

JORDAN SHILLING, Staff
Senator John Coghill
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented an overview of SB 43 on behalf of the sponsor.

MITCH FLYNN, Chief
Steese Volunteer Fire Department
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions related to SB 43.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:38:58 PM](#)

CHAIR LESIL MCGUIRE called the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:38 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Costello, Wielechowski, Coghill, and Chair McGuire.

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS:

[1:39:21 PM](#)

CHAIR MCGUIRE announced the first order of business would be confirmation hearings for the State Board of Parole and the Alaska Police Standards Council. She asked Mr. Larson to tell the committee about his interest in serving on the State Board of Parole.

State Board of Parole

[1:39:29 PM](#)

RICHARD "OLE" LARSON, Appointee, State Board of Parole, Anchorage, Alaska, testified that he is seeking his second five-year term on the State Board of Parole. He shared that he worked for the Department of Corrections for over 29 years and retired as the superintendent of the Mat-Su Pretrial Facility. He said he is also on the Mat-Su School Board which gives him more appreciation for the Board of Parole's goal to ensure that parolees have the opportunity to get into rehabilitation and education programs. He looks forward to continuing to serve the state.

SENATOR COGHILL thanked Mr. Larson and asked if he had any suggestions for effective rehabilitation tools for parolees.

MR. LARSON described the PACE program and what it has to offer, such as drug and alcohol programs. He stressed the importance of not having the parolee go through a program independently. The goal is to provide effective drug and alcohol programs, cognitive thinking programs, and moral recognition programs followed by long-term after care to reinforce the skills.

SENATOR COGHILL noted that the committee considered the PACE Program last year. He asked if there had been a discussion about whether the State Parole Board or a specialty court or a

combination of the two should be used as a vetting tool for long-term felons.

MR. LARSON explained that the parole staff vets applications and then they are submitted to the governor's office or the clemency board. However, the clemency board has not been in operation for eight years and the hope is that under Governor Walker it can be reactivated.

[1:46:43 PM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO thanked Mr. Larson and opined that his background made him perfect for the job. She brought up the connection between reading skills in third grade and the future history of crime.

MR. LARSON said the parole board does look at level of education as a parole item for consideration. He agreed that reading readiness is important. He mentioned the number of children with parents who are incarcerated and the need for intervention.

[1:50:25 PM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO said she would like to see school/business partnerships strengthened at an early age.

CHAIR MCGUIRE noted his long years of service.

MR. LARSON said his experience at McLaughlin opened his eyes to many issues.

CHAIR MCGUIRE echoed Senator Costello's thanks. She spoke of the cost of corrections and the difficulty in rehabilitation.

Alaska Police Standards Council

[1:53:08 PM](#)

CHAIR MCGUIRE recognized Chief Sandahl.

GUSTAF SANDAHL, Chief, Kenai Police Department, testified as an appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council. He described his law enforcement history with the Kenai Police Department and his education. He said this would be his second term on the council. He noted his role on the council is an important one and he enjoyed his experience. He explained what the staff of the council does.

CHAIR MCGUIRE thanked Mr. Sandahl for his service.

[1:56:45 PM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL voiced gratitude for Mr. Sandahl's service.

[1:57:44 PM](#)

CHAIR MCGUIRE recognized Ms. Hamon.

REBECCA HAMON, Appointee, Alaska Police Standards Council, King Salmon, Alaska, testified as an appointee to the Alaska Police Standards Council. She described her work with Safe and Fear-Free Environment (SAFE) in Dillingham as an advocate for victims of domestic violence. She said she works in partnership with the local police departments, troopers, and service providers. She said she has worked on the council for two years. She said she brings a unique viewpoint to the council in that she is not in police work. She has raised her family in King Salmon and is a part of a community team. She hopes to bring understanding of rural issues to the council and the state.

[2:02:02 PM](#)

CHAIR MCGUIRE pointed out the highlights of Ms. Hamon's resume and thanked her for her service as a public member on the council.

[2:03:14 PM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL expressed his gratitude for her service and work.

CHAIR MCGUIRE discussed the importance of SAFE.

[The names were advanced to the full body for consideration.]

SB 43-IMMUNITY FOR FIRE DEPT. & MEMBERS

[2:04:05 PM](#)

CHAIR MCGUIRE announced the consideration of SB 43. "An Act relating to immunity for a fire department and employees or members of a fire department." She noted that Chief Flynn testified at the last meeting. [CSSB 43(JUD) was before the committee.]

SENATOR COGHILL asked his staff to review the bill.

[2:04:46 PM](#)

JORDAN SHILLING, Staff, Senator John Coghill, Alaska State Legislature, presented an overview of SB 43 on behalf of the sponsor. He said Alaska has a fire department immunity statute that applies to staff of fire departments, but it does not

provide protection to contract fire departments. There are seven departments that fall under this situation and SB 43 extends the protection to those fire departments.

CHAIR MCGUIRE asked Senator Wielechowski if he has any concerns about changes in the bill.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said he discussed it with Mr. Shilling and plans to support the bill.

SENATOR COGHILL noted in his area almost all firefighters are volunteers.

[2:07:15 PM](#)

CHAIR MCGUIRE asked if contract fire fighters receive state system benefits.

MR. SHILLING replied he did not think so.

CHAIR MCGUIRE opined that all fire departments should be treated equally.

MITCH FLYNN, Chief, Steese Volunteer Fire Department, said his volunteer department has similar benefits but not through the state.

CHAIR MCGUIRE voiced support for equal treatment.

[2:09:21 PM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO asked if there has been any opposition to the bill.

MR. SHILLING answered no.

SENATOR COSTELLO asked if there has been litigation related to this issue that this bill could have clarified.

MR. SHILLING replied he was aware of one lawsuit in the Fairbanks North Star Borough that the immunity statute would have prevented.

CHAIR MCGUIRE found no further testifiers and closed public testimony.

[2:10:47 PM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL motioned to report CS for SB 43 from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note.

CHAIR MCGUIRE announced that without objection CSSB 43(JUD) is reported from the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee.

2:11:16 PM

There being nothing further to come before the committee, Chair McGuire adjourned the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee at 2:11 p.m.