

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS

March 7, 2019

1:01 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Gabrielle LeDoux, Chair
Representative Chris Tuck, Vice Chair
Representative Chuck Kopp
Representative Geran Tarr
Representative Steve Thompson
Representative Sharon Jackson
Representative George Rauscher

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 56

"An Act establishing May 15 of each year as Hmong-American Veterans Day."

- MOVED HB 56 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 56

SHORT TITLE: ESTABLISH HMONG-AMERICAN VETERANS DAY

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) TARR

02/20/19	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/20/19	(H)	MLV, CRA
03/05/19	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/05/19	(H)	Heard & Held
03/05/19	(H)	MINUTE(MLV)
03/07/19	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

VERDIE BOWEN, Director
Office of Veterans Affairs
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 56 and answered questions from the committee.

PASERT LEE, Founder
Hmong Alaska Community, Inc.
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 56.

SAMAK VONGVILAY
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in Lao, translated to English by Pasert Lee, in support of HB 56.

XAI SHOUA VANG
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in Hmong, translated to English by Mai Xiong, in support of HB 56.

WILSON VANG
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 56.

MAI XIONG
Hmong Alaska Community, Inc.
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 56.

KANG YANG
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 56.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:01:13 PM](#)

CHAIR GABRIELLE LEDOUX called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. Representatives Thompson, Rauscher, Jackson, Tarr, Tuck, and LeDoux were present at the call to order. Representative Kopp arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 56-ESTABLISH HMONG-AMERICAN VETERANS DAY

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CO-CHAIR LEDOUX announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 56 "An Act establishing May 15 of each year as Hmong-American Veterans Day."

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CO-CHAIR LEDOUX opened public testimony on HB 56.

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VERDIE BOWEN, Director, Office of Veterans Affairs, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, stressed the importance of identifying and honoring Hmong-American veterans. He said he supported establishing May 15 as Hmong-American Veterans Day. He noted that the community has celebrated on that day for a number of years.

CO-CHAIR LEDOUX said May 15 has been a day of celebration since the passage of House Concurrent Resolution 3 [passed in the Twenty-Eighth Alaska State Legislature]. She thanked Representative Tarr for introducing HB 56 to permanently establish the holiday.

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PASERT LEE, Founder, Hmong Alaska Community, Inc., testified on behalf of Hmong-American veterans in support of HB 56. He said that after 40 years, Hmong-American veterans want to be recognized for their service alongside American soldiers. He said HB 56 would recognize them and the sacrifices made on behalf of the United States by the Hmong people. He added that permanently putting Hmong-American Veterans Day on the calendar would honor those Hmong-Americans who chose to settle in Alaska.

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SAMAK VONGVILAY, his testimony translated from Lao by Pasert Lee, testified in favor of HB 56. He asked for May 15 to be a permanent recognition of Hmong and Lao veterans.

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XAI SHOUA VANG, his testimony translated from Hmong by Mai Xiong, testified as a Hmong-American veteran in support of HB 56. He said he supported making May 15 a permanent day to honor Hmong-American veterans.

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WILSON VANG testified in support of HB 56 and a permanent Hmong-American Veterans Day.

[1:16:16 PM](#)

MAI XIONG Hmong Alaska Community, Inc., testified in support of HB 56. She said she wanted May 15 permanently added to the calendar as Hmong-American Veterans Day. She noted that the community has celebrated on May 15 for several years.

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KANG YANG introduced herself as the daughter and granddaughter of two Hmong Vietnam War veterans. She said she spoke for the younger generation of the Anchorage Hmong community. She relayed that her grandfather died without any recognition during his lifetime. She said HB 56 represents an opportunity to honor those veterans still living. Ms. Yang said when she was younger, she did not know how to answer the question "who or what are the Hmong?" She said her confusion about Hmong history made her feel ashamed. She said when she was older, she learned about Hmong participation during the Secret War in Laos. She said her father was born into a warzone and fought side by side with American soldiers at the age of 14. She expressed support for HB 56, reaffirmed the importance of honoring Hmong-American veterans, and thanked the bill's sponsors.

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CO-CHAIR LEDOUX thanked all the testifiers. She closed public testimony on HB 56.

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REPRESENTATIVE KOPP thanked Representative Tarr for bringing the bill forward. He remarked that the Hmong have remained absent from the written narrative of the Vietnam War for many decades. He compared it to the absence of Alaska's indigenous population from Alaska's written narrative. He said he was pleased to see the Hmong recognized. He said, "We owe a great debt to these people we can never repay."

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER summarized what he saw as positive aspects of HB 56. He shared his appreciation for Representative Tarr and Chair LeDoux.

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REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON said he would like to co-sponsor HB 56.

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CO-CHAIR LEDOUX said she expected multiple representatives will co-sponsor HB 56.

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REPRESENTATIVE TARR thanked the testifiers and acknowledged the coordination required to translate from Lao and Hmong.

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REPRESENTATIVE JACKSON asked Mr. Bowen if there is a book about Hmong veterans.

MR. BOWEN referenced a book titled The Tragic Mountain. He said the Office of Veteran Affairs has not produced its own title.

REPRESENTATIVE JACKSON said she recalled a book available through the Office of Veterans Affairs.

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MR. BOWEN said his office has a book commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Vietnam War. He said the office has four copies remaining of 1,500.

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CO-CHAIR LEDOUX shared her experience getting to know Hmong people in Anchorage. She called it a tragedy that their sacrifices have gone unknown. She thanked the legislature for efforts to recognize them. She said more needs to be done on the federal level.

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REPRESENTATIVE TUCK moved to report HB 56 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying zero fiscal

note. There being no objection, HB 56 was moved from the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

1:25:50 PM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 1:26 p.m.