

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

April 24, 2019

9:02 a.m.

9:02:43 AM

CALL TO ORDER

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

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Natasha von Imhof, Co-Chair
Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair
Senator Click Bishop
Senator Peter Micciche
Senator Donny Olson
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Senator David Wilson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Mike Shower

ALSO PRESENT

Senator Cathy Giessel; Senator Scott Kawasaki, Sponsor; Jacob Gerrish, Staff, Senator Scott Kawasaki; Kris Curtis, Legislative Auditor, Alaska Division of Legislative Audit; Bev Schoonover, Acting Executive Director, Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; Sam Trivette, Juneau Suicide Prevention Coalition, Juneau; Linda Brazak, Administrative Operations Manager, Division of Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Social Services; Maridon Boario, Staff, Senator Lyman Hoffman; Lisa Parady, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators; Patience Fredericksen, Director of Libraries, Archives and Museums, Department of Education and Early Development.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Barbara Franks, Chair, Statewide Suicide Prevention, Ninilchik; Sharon Fishel, Education Specialist, Department of Education and Early Development; Katie Botz, Self, Minnesota; Dan Walker, Superintendent, Lower Kuskokwim

School District; Brett Agenbroad, Superintendent, Pribilof School District; Sam Jordan, Self, Juneau; John Conwell, Superintendent Unalaska City School District; Patrick Mayer, Superintendent, Yakutat School District.

SUMMARY

SB 10 EXTEND SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL

SB 10 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 74 INTERNET FOR SCHOOLS

SB 74 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 95 SETBACKS, SUBMERGED LAND, LAND TRANSFERS

SB 95 was REPORTED out of committee with a "no recommendation" recommendation and with one previously published zero fiscal note: FN 1(CED).

Co-Chair von Imhof reminded the committee that SB 66 had been removed from the agenda.

#sb95

SENATE BILL NO. 95

"An Act approving the transfer of certain Alaska Railroad Corporation land; and providing for an effective date."

[9:03:37 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof relayed that the committee had first heard SB 95 on April 9, 2019. Public testimony was closed. Her office had received no amendments nor heard of any concerns pertaining to the bill.

Senator Wielechowski MOVED to report SB 95 out of Committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal note. There being NO OBJECTION, it was so ordered.

SB 95 was REPORTED out of committee with a "no recommendation" recommendation and with one previously published zero fiscal note: FN 1(CED).

#sb10

SENATE BILL NO. 10

"An Act extending the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; and providing for an effective date."

[9:04:37 AM](#)

SENATOR SCOTT KAWASAKI, SPONSOR, introduced himself.

JACOB GERRISH, STAFF, SENATOR SCOTT KAWASAKI, introduced himself.

Senator Kawasaki discussed SB 10. He read from a Sponsor Statement (copy on file):

Senate Bill 10 would extend the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council to 2027, ensuring another eight years of support for suicide prevention efforts in Alaska. The Council would otherwise be terminated on June 30, 2019.

According to the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Section of Epidemiology, the suicide rate in Alaska increased by 13 percent between 2012 and 2017, making suicide the leading cause of death for Alaskans between the ages of 10 and 64. As a matter of public health, the state has a responsibility to address this disturbing trend and must actively continue to pursue strategies to prevent suicide in Alaska.

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council was created in 2001 and consists of 14 public and private members, including four state legislators. Under AS 44.39.350, the Council is statutorily responsible for:

- Advising legislators and the Governor on ways to improve Alaskans' health and wellness by reducing suicide;
- Improving public awareness of suicide and risk factors;
- Enhancing suicide prevention efforts;
- Working with partners and faith-based organizations to develop healthier communities;
- Creating a statewide suicide prevention plan and putting it in action; and

- Building and strengthening partnerships to prevent suicide.

The Council holds public meetings, publishes a 5-Year State Suicide Prevention Plan, and works with schools and community groups to provide resources that educate Alaskans on how to prevent suicide.

Last year, the Council partnered with the Alaska Community Foundation and Alaska Children's Trust to continue the GCI Suicide Prevention Grant Program. Nine grants were funded in 2017 across the state, totaling \$100,000. The Council also helped secure funding for a 5-year grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to create the Alaska Native Collaborative Hub for Resilience Research, which will help Alaska Native communities share knowledge, guide research, and identify culturally relevant suicide prevention strategies in rural Alaska.

Terminating the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council would jeopardize the state's efforts at addressing this heartbreaking, but preventable, issue. I respectfully ask for your support of SB 10 this year.

Senator Kawasaki added that the council would sunset on June 30, 2019 if it were not extended.

[9:07:46 AM](#)

Senator Olson considered the extension of the council and reflected on the proposed eight-year extension. He wondered how to determine whether the council had been effective.

Senator Kawasaki responded that there had been recent progress in the area of prevention.

[9:09:08 AM](#)

Senator Olson queried whether there were numbers to show the council had been effective in reducing suicide.

Senator Kawasaki preferred to let council members discuss the work of the council.

[9:10:02 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof noted that there was invited testimony to address questions.

[9:10:32 AM](#)

KRIS CURTIS, LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR, ALASKA DIVISION OF LEGISLATIVE AUDIT, referenced the audit "A Sunset Review of the Department of Health and Social Services, Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (council)" dated August 3, 2018(copy on file). She read from the report conclusions from the front page of the audit:

The audit found the council operated in the public's interest by actively broadening the public's awareness of suicide prevention and coordinating the efforts of other suicide prevention entities including State agencies, regional groups, coalitions, and local communities. Additionally, the council fulfilled its statutory duty by issuing the 2018-2022 Suicide Prevention Plan and working closely with stakeholders to add and refine the plan's strategies, resources, and indicators. The audit also concluded that administrative improvements were needed to ensure council meetings are adequately public noticed and the executive director is consistently evaluated on an annual basis.

Ms. Curtis referenced Page 4 of the audit, which showed the council's schedule of expenditures and funding sources. The council was funded by General Fund (GF) appropriations for just over \$650,000 in FY 18. The expenditures for the council were just under \$600,000 in FY 18.

Ms. Curtis referenced Pages 9 and 10 of the audit, which showed a list of council activities. She noted that the council was very active. The council had two recommendations for the council, which were administrative and should be easily addressed. She read the recommendations listed on Page 12 of the audit:

Recommendation No. 1: The council's executive director should develop and implement procedures to ensure public notices for meetings are published timely and accurately.

From July 2014 through March 2018, five of the 18 meetings held (28 percent) were not public noticed or

not public noticed properly. Specifically, two were not published on the State's Online Public Notices system, two were published with incorrect meeting dates, and one was published one day prior to the meeting. The deficiencies were caused by a lack of written procedures to ensure notices are posted timely and contain accurate meeting dates.

Recommendation No. 2: The council chair should develop and implement written procedures to ensure performance evaluations are completed annually for the council's executive director.

Between July 2014 and March 2018, two evaluations were completed for the executive director; however, two more should have been completed. Specifically, there were no evaluations for the period of November 2014 to November 2015, and November 2015 to June 2016. Per discussion with council staff and the previous council chair, it is unclear why the evaluations were not completed for the executive director.

The responses to the audit began on Page 23. The council and the department concurred with the report conclusions and recommendations.

[9:13:10 AM](#)

BEV SCHOONOVER, ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, STATEWIDE SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL, thanked the committee for their work. She noted that she had been acting in the role of executive director since January 2019. She said that the council had been established by the legislature in 2001 and served as an advisory council to the governor and the legislature regarding suicide awareness and prevention. She shared that there were 13 volunteer members, appointed by the governor, and 4 ex-officio members appointed by the legislature. She stated that the council had one, full-time staff member, co-located in the shared offices with the Alaska Mental Health Trust board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. She related that the council met three times per year via video conference, and held one, in-person meeting, per year, typically in a rural community.

Ms. Schoonover noted that most of the council's activities involved coordinating collaborative efforts between

stakeholders, supporting outreach in educational programs through the Suicide Awareness Prevention and Postvention grant programs, advocating for federal and private funding, and providing technical assistance as needed. She shared that one example of statewide coordination efforts was the completion of the 5-year prevention plan entitled, "Recasting the Net: Promoting Wellness to Prevent Suicide in Alaska." She furthered that thanks to extensive public input and stakeholder collaboration hundreds of Alaskans, from all over the state, participated in the creation of the plan. She related that the number one goal identified in the plan by all the stakeholders was that Alaskans accept responsibility for preventing suicide.

Ms. Schoonover expressed the belief that all Alaskans have been touched by suicide and had the responsibility to address and reduce the risk of suicide statewide. She said that the council brought Alaskans together to talk about suicide, to evaluate prevention efforts, advised agencies, the governor, and the legislature on how wellness can be promoted, and coordinated state agencies and other entities so that they could work together more effectively to prevent suicide. She noted that no other agency performed the statewide coordinator function. She urged the committee to extend the council through 2027.

[9:16:17 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof thought Ms. Schoonover had touched on the primary role of the council, which was to coordinate local organizations all over the state. She thought the critical role of connecting resources was important.

[9:17:09 AM](#)

Senator Bishop asked what Ms. Schoonover had considered to get more resources in communities to address the high rate of suicide in the state.

Ms. Schoonover noted that there had been a vacancy in the Division of Behavioral Health for a Prevention Specialist that had recently been filled by Leah van Kirk. She thought Ms. Van Kirk, along with Eric Boyer from AMHTA, and Project Assistant Eric Morrison, working with the council would prove especially fruitful in suicide prevention in 2020.

[9:18:33 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof commended the council for coordinating across agencies.

[9:19:18 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof OPENED public testimony.

[9:19:43 AM](#)

SAM TRIVETTE, JUNEAU SUICIDE PREVENTION COALITION, JUNEAU, thanked Senator Kawasaki and the co-sponsors for sponsoring the bill. It was the third legislative session that he had testified for the extension of the council. He was a survivor of suicide loss. He lost his son to suicide on June 28, 2007. He asserted that the council had linked him to national experts and resources helping to tackle this major public health problem and was the glue that bound together all the people in the state working on suicide prevention issues. He provided several examples of the positive changes he had witnessed due to the work of the council: destigmatizing suicide, The Care Line (Alaska's suicide prevention hotline) had seen a three-fold increase, over the last four fiscal years, to over 21,000 calls in FY 2019.

Mr. Trivette discussed suicide prevention efforts in schools. He shared that the data showed that the rate of kids willing to contact an adult with risk concerns was over 42 percent. There had been a substantial increase in hospitals and health care centers that screened for suicide, which was a major change from 5 years ago. He urged the committee to support the extension of the council.

[9:24:10 AM](#)

BARBARA FRANKS, CHAIR, STATEWIDE SUICIDE PREVENTION, NINILCHIK (via teleconference), testified that she was the mother of a child that died by suicide. Her son had died by suicide on December 14, 1997. She shared that two days later her husband died from cancer. She had known there were people that were advocating for cancer support, but at that time she had not found support groups for suicide. She referenced her colleague Cynthia Erickson, who had been recognized for her work with Grandmas House. She believed that domestic violence, sexual assault, drugs, and alcohol

were related to suicide. She said that in 2013, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline had received over a million calls. She said that in 2018, 2,224,408 people had called the number. She expressed deep appreciation for the work of the council and statewide allies.

[9:28:37 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof thanked Ms. Franks for her powerful testimony.

SHARON FISHEL, EDUCATION SPECIALIST, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. She had lost her son to suicide in 2010.

Co-Chair von Imhof requested further information on how the department coordinated with schools in the state.

Ms. Fishel noted that the funding provided through the council was the primary source of funding for suicide and trauma work accomplished through DEED. She stated that there were currently 23,000 users for online professional development. She said that while DEED offered many professional development resources to all districts, by far the largest and most popular were the online suicide prevention courses supported by the funding. She relayed that the department also provided competitive school-based suicide prevention grants on a three-year competitive process to up to 10 districts throughout the state. She said that every year schools provided progress reports. She shared that the Nome School District had a youth leaders' program that taught groups of students to be leaders in their communities based on the Natural Helpers Program. She said that these youth were making positive changes in their communities. She relayed that it was difficult to say how many lives had been saved by the programs and she lamented that suicide was the leading cause of death for those 14 to 24-years old in the state.

[9:32:26 AM](#)

Ms. Fishel believed that school districts were doing phenomenal work across the state.

[9:33:06 AM](#)

KATIE BOTZ, SELF, MINNESOTA (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. She thought Alaska was second in the country for its number of suicides. She believed that suicide was a taboo subject. She revealed that she had considered suicide. She lamented that there were many people that did not have an adequate support system. She urged support for the extension of the council.

[9:35:54 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof CLOSED public testimony.

Co-Chair von Imhof listed the people available for questions.

[9:36:27 AM](#)

AT EASE

[9:36:8 AM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Stedman discussed FN1 from the Department of Health and Social Services, OMB Component Number 2651. The note showed \$648,400 in the governor's FY 20 request, with flat funding for the subsequent five years.

Co-Chair von Imhof set the bill aside for further review.

SB 10 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#sb74

SENATE BILL NO. 74

"An Act relating to funding for Internet services for school districts."

[9:38:09 AM](#)

MARIDON BOARIO, STAFF, SENATOR LYMAN HOFFMAN, read from the sponsor statement for SB 74 (version S) (copy on file):

SB 74 increases the broadband requirement for schools from 10 megabits per second (Mbps) to 25 Mbps of download speed and provides funding to help schools reach the 25 Mbps through the School Broadband Assistance Grant (BAG).

Districts that qualify for discounted rate for internet services under the Federal Universal Services Program are eligible.

The Universal Service Administrative Company, Schools and Libraries Program, commonly known as "E-rate," provides discounts of up to 90 percent to help eligible schools and libraries in the United States obtain affordable telecommunications and internet access.

The School BAG was established in 2014 and created to assist schools to reach internet download speeds of 10 Mbps. Currently the grant funds may be used to cover eligible costs incurred by the school districts for schools that have less than 10 Mbps each fiscal year. Since 2014 new and improved technologies and increases to internet services have allowed for more and faster delivery of internet services. Because the cost of internet in some rural districts has decreased, the annual internet costs have fallen below the 2014 benchmark established by state law. To allow school districts to utilize these advances, SB 74 will increase the minimum requirement of Mbps from 10 to 25 which will increase the amount of Broadband Assistance Grants (BAG) that the state can pay to school districts.

In 2019, 80 schools in 20 school districts will benefit from the school BAG awards.

The funding leverages federal E-rate funds at approximately 8:1. The program allows for leverage for up to 9:1 based on a formula for free and reduced lunch calculation by district.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 74 to help bring improved broadband services to rural Alaska and improve service for schools across the state.

I urge your support of this legislation to provide Alaskan students, classrooms and teachers and all educators better access to the digital world.

[9:40:45 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman wondered why the internet in Angoon's school was slow when there was fiberoptic cable connecting the community.

Ms. Boario thought the question should be asked to the telecommunication company in charge of the fiber optic cable.

Co-Chair von Imhof thought Co-Chair Stedman had proposed a good question. She thought that telecommunication companies should be questioned.

[9:42:01 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman thought that more fiber optic hook ups would help to serve more communities' internet needs.

Co-Chair von Imhof agreed that internet connection was good for telehealth and tele education.

[9:42:33 AM](#)

Senator Wilson noted that in FY 19 there had been upgrades to 80 schools in the state. He wondered whether they had been considered in the legislation.

Ms. Boario said that it was expected that in FY 2019, 80 schools, in 20 districts, would reach the 10 megabits per second with the School Broadband Assistance grant.

Senator Wilson asked whether rural schools were prioritized over schools in the Railbelt.

Ms. Boario understood that the program was created to primarily assist rural school districts, however all school districts in the state could apply.

[9:43:56 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof noted that there were people online to answer technical questions.

[9:44:24 AM](#)

LISA PARADY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALASKA COUNCIL OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, testified in support of SB 74. She was also representing Norm Wooten, the Executive Director of the

Association of Alaska School Boards. She reiterated that the bill increased the broadband requirement from 10 megabits per second to 25 megabits per second. The bill provided funding for schools to reach the 25 megabits through the School Broadband Assistance Grant

Ms. Parady discussed her involvement in bringing forward the first broadband assistance grant in 2015, when she worked on the North Slope. She noted that it was unlikely, given the state's current financial situation, that the state would be entirely connected all at once, but that taking small connectivity steps was the way forward.

Ms. Parady recounted that the original grant had been focused on all schools, setting the floor for all schools at 10 megabits per second. She said that the position of educators across the state was that increased broadband should be of the highest priority.

[9:48:41 AM](#)

Ms. Parady relayed the detailed position of Alaskan school leaders from across the state. She noted that the funding would leverage federal dollars for broadband expansion. She stressed that technology was a core service that should be provided to Alaskan students. She believed the bill was timely and would provide equity with connectivity. She reiterated the 9 to 1 E-Rate federal match. She hoped that the bill would be passed in the current legislative session so that grant recipient applicants could apply for the next school year. She stressed that all schools, no matter of their geography, should have equitable access to educational opportunities. She urged strong support for the legislation.

[9:52:34 AM](#)

Senator Micciche was interested in the potential to reduce education costs across the state. He asked Ms. Parady whether she considered that there would be an offset that equaled the investment in the long term.

Ms. Parady thought an investment in education reaped great rewards. She thought students were being denied the full range of available professional learning opportunities. She used the example of an Advanced Placement chemistry teacher that would not otherwise be available in rural Alaska.

Ms. Parady continued to address Senator Micciche's question. She thought there was an opportunity to enhance learning throughout the state by extending the reach of educators through technology. She could not speak to savings justifying the expense but stressed that greater access would be granted to student across the state through district collaboration.

[9:55:05 AM](#)

Senator Wielechowski asked whether there was research on how increased screen time affected educational outcomes for K-12 students.

Ms. Parady thought there was a body of research. She agreed to provide the information later.

[9:55:34 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof noted there were other individuals available to provide invited testimony. She asked to hear from the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED). She asked the department to address why the schools on its list had been selected.

[9:56:18 AM](#)

PATIENCE FREDERICKSEN, DIRECTOR OF LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES AND MUSEUMS, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT, noted that the state library administered the BAG grants. The program started as a \$5 million program and had decreased to a \$1.5 million program. The highest number of schools that needed assistance was at 135, during the second year of the program, that number had decreased to 80. She thought that the decrease was because of more robust internet in certain schools that could afford the expansion without state assistance.

Ms. Fredericksen addressed a new fiscal note from DEED. She explained that the note reflected \$7.1 million for FY 20. She highlighted that the number came in lower when subtracting the \$1.5 million in the current program.

[9:59:51 AM](#)

Senator Bishop noted that the fiscal note went down in the out years.

[10:00:14 AM](#)

Senator Wilson wondered how many schools per year were served by the program.

Ms. Fredericksen anticipated that 172 schools would be eligible as of March 2019. She said that the second year of the program would see the most schools, and as the cost of internet decreased in the villages, a reduction in schools would be seen. She said that in 2015, the average award was \$29,000, per school, for internet support. She said that that number fell to \$17,000 by the end of the program, the decrease in the cost of the internet was expected to fall in the same pattern in the future.

[10:01:31 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof thought there was 174 schools across the state that had 25megabits or less. She asked how many years it would take to get the 172 schools brought up to speed.

Ms. Fredericksen stated that if the infrastructure was in place at the location of the school, the school could reach 25megabits within the first year, if additional infrastructure had to be added the process could take up to two years.

Co-Chair von Imhof asked how the routers and infrastructure would be funded.

Ms. Fredericksen stated that school districts paid for those things in the previous version of the program.

[10:03:01 AM](#)

Senator Micciche understood that the \$7,169.4 reflected on the fiscal note was to replace the 10megabit program, which was a difference of \$5,681.9 after the \$1,487.5 already included in the governor's FY 19 budget.

Ms. Fredericksen answered in the affirmative.

[10:03:54 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof OPENED public testimony.

DAN WALKER, SUPERINTENDENT, LOWER KUSKOKWIM SCHOOL DISTRICT (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. He thanked the committee for its consideration. He noted that LKSD was the largest Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) in the state with 27 schools, 22 of the schools were in remote villages, and approximately 4,100. The poverty rate was a little over 90 percent. He had been involved in education in LKSD for over 27 years. He strongly believed access to broadband internet levelled the playing field for rural students. He said that LKSD viewed broadband as a critical teaching tool for engaging students in the digital age. He said that in rural schools it was impossible to provide a highly qualified teacher in every subject area. He said that the district currently operated 5 teaching studios, offering 15 classes ranging from social studies to dual credit college courses. He lamented that the district was woefully short of the FCC target range of 1megabit per student and was currently at less than 10 percent at that recommended bandwidth. He stressed the critical need for increased broadband in his district.

[10:08:04 AM](#)

BRETT AGENBROAD, SUPERINTENDENT, PRIBILOF SCHOOL DISTRICT (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. He noted that the Pribilof Islands were not only rural, but remote. He stated that for the past six years there had been a different math and science teacher each year. The turnover had been detrimental to students. He detailed the struggles that accompanied the 10megabits. He noted that information went out at 10megabits per second but was received at only 2.5megabits per second. The largest class in the district was 20 students. He noted that the weather was another contributing factor in internet efficiency. When the weather was harsh it could drop the internet connection by 50 percent.

[10:11:55 AM](#)

Mr. Agenbroad stressed that reliable broadband was critical to the education of students in his district.

[10:12:43 AM](#)

Senator Micciche asked whether equitable access to educational materials increased student interest and graduation rates. He queried whether it was worth the cost.

Mr. Agenbroad thought that the access better prepared the students for the future. Having a coherent tracking to students from year to year was beneficial. He listed the myriad of ways people in the community were utilizing internet learning.

10:14:20 AM

SAM JORDAN, SELF, JUNEAU (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill. He thought schools in Alaska had embraced the internet as a great tool for delivering education to students and professional development for staff, as well as communication and coordination between school districts. Additionally, he thought many schools in the state had been able to keep pace with educational opportunities. He thought much of the software developed in recent years was cloud-based and the bill would help schools to keep pace with increasing technological demands. He thought it was important to support the infrastructure in order to offer equitable educational opportunities to all students in the state.

10:16:56 AM

JOHN CONWELL, SUPERINTENDENT UNALASKA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. His district had participated in the broadband assistance program since it's inception. He said that with the program's assistance the school had been able to grow from a 3megabit connection to a 20megabit connection. The 20megabit connection was shared, through a consortium agreement, between two schools (425 students), and the local public library. With the current internet speed, the school district was still unable to offer students basic access to the digital educational content commonplace in other parts of the state and the Lower 48. The school did not have the capacity to offer online assessments; Unalaska was one of eight Alaska school district that administered the Performance Evaluation of Alaska's (PEAKS) test via paper and pencil, due to bandwidth limitations. He stressed that the increased broadband support provided under the bill would give hundreds of students and teacher access to the educational content and services offered through the internet. He thanked the sponsor and co-sponsors of the bill for closing the digital gap for students in the state.

[10:18:58 AM](#)

PATRICK MAYER, SUPERINTENDENT, YAKUTAT SCHOOL DISTRICT (via teleconference), spoke in strong support of the bill. He believed that all students in Alaska deserved the full transformative power of technology and access to online resources. He relayed that digital content made up a large portion of the district's basic curriculum. He noted that technology was not presented as a measure to replace teachers, rather extending the reach of good teachers to all students. He said that the lack of fiber optic access in Yakutat limited the ability to stream content and utilize digital content. He said that the district was regularly forced to pick and choose what could be simultaneously participate in, without saturating bandwidth. He added that the limitations also hampered student's ability to enroll and participate in dual credit opportunities. He lamented that this was the case for many schools in Alaska. He stated that while student skill deficiencies could be identified, quality online intervention opportunities could not be accessed. He reiterated that the ACSA stood in support of continuing the grant and increasing the level of state funded bandwidth to 25megabits per second.

[10:21:39 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof CLOSED public testimony.

[10:21:53 AM](#)

Senator Wilson referenced the "FY2019 Alaska Schools Under 25 MBPS" (copy on file) and asked whether the schools that were not listed were already above 25megabits per second.

Ms. Fredericksen answered in the affirmative.

Senator Wilson asked whether the agency followed up with school districts that did not complete an application.

Ms. Fredericksen stated that there was one school in a district that did not accept an award. She said she could not speak to why individual schools would not apply to receive funding.

[10:24:23 AM](#)

Senator Olson reminded the committee that schools in his district were spread far and wide. He found it highly unlikely that there were schools in his district that did not need additional funding for broadband.

[10:24:45 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman wondered about Port Alexander, which showed 3 megabits per minute.

Ms. Fredericksen agreed to provide more information. She explained that sometime schools self-selected a smaller amount of speed at a lower cost.

[10:26:16 AM](#)

Co-Chair von Imhof thought it was important to understand the program was an annual program to address operating costs rather than infrastructure. She thought it might be nice to see a list of schools with a map overlaid on where broadband fiber optic cable had been laid in the state. She wondered about a long-term plan.

Ms. Fredericksen stated that the FCC list that she had used to develop the list of 172 schools, listed how each school received their internet. She agreed to relay the information to the committee.

Co-Chair von Imhof assumed that those on fiber optic cable would exceed 25megabits.

[10:28:28 AM](#)

Senator Olson asked why a school would not request the maximum amount of internet connectivity available.

Ms. Fredericksen thought that local funding could be a challenge for some schools.

[10:28:57 AM](#)

Senator Wilson understood that superintendents changed. He asked whether the program could be applied for yearly; would there be another opportunity for schools to apply.

Ms. Fredericksen stated that as an annual program, the notice was sent to all superintendents, if they missed out

on the first year of the program, they could apply for the second year of the program.

Co-Chair von Imhof understood that the application process occurred annually.

Ms. Frederickson answered in the affirmative. She noted that the process was not onerous and included: an Excel Spreadsheet that listed costs, certification from the superintendent, and cost documentation from the internet provider.

Co-Chair von Imhof thought that if the goal was for every district to maintain 25megabits, but must reapply annually, it might be better to bring schools up to speed and keep them there for the long term. She realized that this was a lofty goal.

Ms. Fredericksen asked to clarify the fiscal note. She spoke to the narrative on page 2 of the fiscal note:

The estimated total cost to bring the 172 schools up from 10 mbps to 25 mbps will be \$7,135.4. Currently, under AS 14.03.127, \$1,487.5 is included in the Governor's FY2020 Amended Budget request to fund the current requirement of up to 10bmps. This \$1,487.5 will need to be funded in all of the out years, in order to pay for 0-10mbps internet coverage in tandem with current fiscal note that covers 10-25mbps. The entire program will continue as one application for up to 25mbps. This fiscal note assumes that internet costs will rise proportionately from 10 mbps to 25 mbps. It also accepts that the FY2019 School BAG program numbers are an accurate predictor of what the FY2020 School BAG program will need at 25 mbps.

[10:32:08 AM](#)

SB 74 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair von Imhof reviewed the schedule for the following meeting.

#

ADJOURNMENT

[10:32:36 AM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 10:32 a.m.