

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
April 10, 2021
10:03 a.m.

[10:03:15 AM](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Foster called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Neal Foster, Co-Chair
Representative Kelly Merrick, Co-Chair
Representative Dan Ortiz, Vice-Chair
Representative Ben Carpenter
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Representative Andy Josephson
Representative Bart LeBon
Representative Steve Thompson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative DeLena Johnson
Representative Sara Rasmussen
Representative Adam Wool

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Ron Carmen, Self, Kenai; John Erickson, Manager, City and Borough of Yakutat, Yakutat; Anne Bailey, Administrator, Aleutian East Borough; Moe Zamarron, Manager, City of Unalakleet, Unalakleet; Anne Dennis-Choi, President, Alaska Child and Family, Anchorage; Becky Long, Self, Talkeetna; Pat Branson, Mayor, City of Kodiak, Kodiak; Jennifer Walker, Self, Juneau; Lesley Anderson, Human Resources Manager, Alaska Child and Family, Anchorage; Jessica Plachta, Executive Director, Lynn Canal Conservation, Haines; Nicholas Szatkowska, Self, Haines; Gail Heineman, Self, Anchorage; Elijah Jackson, Mayor, City of Ouzinkie, Ouzinkie; Herman Morgan, Self, Aniak; Trevor Storrs, President, Alaska Children's Trust Anchorage; Susan Warner, Self, Gustavus; Gina Agron, Self, Eagle River; Amy Lujan, Legislative Liaison, Alaska Association of School Business Officials, Juneau; Mindy Hunter, Special Education Teacher,

Homer; Brenda Moore, Self, Anchorage; Ed Martin, Self, Sterling; Greg Weaver, Self, Wasilla; Dimitri Shein, Self, Anchorage; Willy Keppel, Self, Quinhagak; Michele Girault, Key Coalition of Alaska, Anchorage; Dianne Macrae, Self, Kasilof; Jennifer Austin, President, Alaska Women's Alliance, Anchorage; Abbe Hensley, Executive Director, Best Beginnings, Anchorage; Marsha Thomason, Self, North Pole; Katie Bender, President, University of Alaska Anchorage Alumni Association Board, Anchorage. Shannon Hunt, Self, Georgia.

SUMMARY

HB 69 APPROP: OPERATING BUDGET/LOANS/FUNDS

HB 69 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 71 APPROP: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET

HB 71 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY: ALL OFFNET SITES

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the agenda for the day.

#hb69

#hb71

HOUSE BILL NO. 69

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and loan program expenses of state government and for certain programs; capitalizing funds; amending appropriations; making reappropriations; making supplemental appropriations; making appropriations under art. IX, sec. 17(c), Constitution of the State of Alaska, from the constitutional budget reserve fund; and providing for an effective date."

HOUSE BILL NO. 71

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and capital expenses of the state's integrated comprehensive mental health program; making supplemental appropriations; and providing for an effective date."

10:04:26 AM

^PUBLIC TESTIMONY: ALL OFFNET SITES

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the call-in numbers for anyone wanting to testify and the email address for those wanting to submit written testimony.

10:06:55 AM

RON CARMEN, SELF, KENAI (via teleconference), was calling in to testify on HB 79.

Co-Chair Foster clarified that the committee was hearing testimony on HB 69 and HB 71.

10:08:14 AM

JOHN ERICKSON, MANAGER, CITY AND BOROUGH OF YAKUTAT, YAKUTAT (via teleconference), expressed concerns about losing the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS). The city was also concerned with any reductions to Power Cost Equalization (PCE) funds. Currently, the city's electric rates were about \$.52 per kilowatt hour rather than \$.28 with the help of PCE. The city lost money in the most recent batch of federal funding relief for COVID-19, which was used to help small businesses, particularly fishermen. The city originally received \$1.5 million in the first round of federal funding. In the second round the city only received \$112,000 in federal funding which could not be used to replace lost revenues. He also spoke to the need of revenue sharing. He reported that the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT) was providing bottled drinking water at the airport in Yakutat due to water contamination.

10:10:52 AM

Vice-Chair Ortiz thanked Mr. Erickson for his testimony. He asked him to speak to the level of ferry service of today compared to years ago.

Mr. Erickson had been the city manager for about 8 years. He indicated ferry service had been reduced by about 50 percent in his time at the city.

10:11:49 AM

ANNE BAILEY, Administrator, ALEUTIAN EAST BOROUGH (via teleconference), reported that the borough was responsible for the municipal governance of the communities of Akutan, Cold Bay, False Pass, King Cove, Nelson Lagoon, and Sand Point. The communities consisted of approximately 3,100 residents and had large transient fishing populations. The borough had 11 full-time employees who filled the obligations of local governments. The local tax base was raw fish tax. The remaining revenue largely came from state and federal sources. The borough had been impacted financially by COVID-19. In particular, the pandemic had impacted the borough's fisheries and tax base. She spoke about the potential for a continued loss in revenue through FY 22. She indicated that the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds could not be used for revenue replacement, nor were they sufficient enough to make up for the borough's losses. The borough faced a deficit of \$1.9 million in FY 22. She requested that the legislature avoid cost shifting and making cuts that impacted local government. She asked members to support fully funding school bond debt reimbursement, harbor bond debt reimbursement, community assistance, and to address shared fish taxes.

10:13:37 AM

Representative Josephson asked, if the state were to fully fund the school bond debt reimbursement, the harbor bond debt reimbursement, and community assistance, whether the borough would continue to have a deficit of \$1.9 million.

Ms. Bailey responded that it would be very helpful if the legislature funded all of the items the representative listed. She relayed that at the 50 percent level for school bond debt reimbursement the borough's revenue would increase by \$334,000. At the 50 percent level for harbor bond debt reimbursement, revenue would increase by about \$300,000. The borough would still have a deficit because of an anticipated significant decrease in fish tax revenues partially due to COVID-19 and low fish quotas.

Representative Josephson asked how the borough would fix the gap.

Ms. Bailey responded, "Well, that's a great question." She was in the process of trying to determine a solution. She could not cut the borough's way out of the deficit. She indicated that cutting any of the 11 positions would not make the borough whole. She reviewed costs the borough would incur including deferred maintenance. She reported that it would be impossible to implement any additional revenues by the following fiscal year.

[10:15:27 AM](#)

MOE ZAMARRON, MANAGER, CITY OF UNALAKLEET, UNALAKLEET (via teleconference), thanked the committee for its work on Power Cost Equalization (PCE) and for money that went towards the village safe water program. He indicated the village underwent a tough winter in terms of water losses and freeze-ups. At one time, 25 percent of the houses froze and were left without water. It appeared funding would be available to the city to improve its drinking water. He brought up the need for additional affordable housing and noted the city faced construction resource challenges. Several entities were working together to bring housing online by rehabilitating buildings, building new facilities, or repurposing facilities. He also mentioned the need for regional jails and a Division of Motor Vehicle (DMV) office, as Unalakleet was a hub for surrounding villages. He also hoped for support for a solid waste and recycling program.

Co-Chair Foster was aware of the water issues Unalakleet was having. He asked if the city intended to use some of the money from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in addition to what the city received from Village Safe Water.

Mr. Zamarron reported that the city had received approval for some funding through Village Safe Water which would help significantly to solve Unalakleet's drinking water issue.

[10:18:50 AM](#)

ANNE DENNIS-CHOI, PRESIDENT, ALASKA CHILD AND FAMILY, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), reported her organization provided trauma-informed behavioral health services to Alaska's most vulnerable. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) caused chronic stress that could disrupt early brain development and the development of the nervous and immune

systems. If untreated, a patient who had an ACE could have life-long consequences linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance use problems in adulthood.

Ms. Dennis-Choi continued that the COVID-19 pandemic had further raised concerns about ACEs because it had dramatically transformed life for children and families creating new stressors and exacerbating existing ones. She was aware the pandemic had had a profound affect. For example, in the 13 to 18 years-old age group, intentional self-harm had increased 80 percent in March 2020 compared to March 2019. In the past year, her staff had been referred to as front line heroes.

Ms. Dennis-Choi relayed that despite being called heroes, due to years of funding cuts, many frontline staff had to work 2 jobs to make ends meet. Wages had been frozen for years without any cost of living increases. As a result, the behavioral health system in Alaska faced significant workforce challenges both recruiting and retaining staff. Staff were the people making a meaningful difference in the lives of children and their families. She highlighted that Alaska spent a significant number of resources on corrections, substance abuse, and chronic health problems related to ACEs. Intervening at any age could be effective, but the younger the better. She urged members to fully support behavioral health treatment and recovery grants and Medicaid.

[10:21:10 AM](#)

BECKY LONG, SELF, TALKEETNA (via teleconference), opposed a portion of HB 69. She did not support the \$15.1 million slated for the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) operating budget. She thought AIDEA acted with a lack of transparency in its board meetings and its public process. She asserted that AIDEA did not follow through with any sort of meeting standards which created false momentum for development projects such as the proposed West Susitna Access without addressing serious concerns. She did not trust AIDEA. She indicated that the AIDEA executive director gave out 3 different reasons, pitches, uses, or spins for \$8.5 million for the West Susitna Access Project in the general obligation bond bill. The director of AIDEA provided differing testimony in the Senate Finance Committee, Senate Resources Committee, and

the House Finance Committee. As a result, the public did not trust AIDEA for accuracy.

Ms. Long continued that AIDEA spent 68 percent of its board meetings in 2020 in executive sessions. On 3 occasions in 2020, 80 percent of the board meetings were in executive session. In February 2020, the board had an 8.5 hour meeting of which 8 hours were spent in executive session. She asserted that the board was voting on resolutions in secret with the passing unanimously. The board's meetings started at different times which made it difficult to determine what time the board was meeting. She considered the lack of transparency to be disenfranchising to the public. She suggested that AIDEA's budget should be blocked until it cleaned up its open meetings practices. The legislature should take back control of the mess within AIDEA. She reiterated all of the problems she had with the way AIDEA conducted its business.

[10:23:16 AM](#)

PAT BRANSON, MAYOR, CITY OF KODIAK, KODIAK (via teleconference), fully supported community assistance, school bond debt reimbursement, and a functional year-round AMHS. The city operated the city jail and asked for state support. She emphasized working together as partners in solving the state budget issues. She also advocated for rural transportation.

[10:25:39 AM](#)

JENNIFER WALKER, SELF, JUNEAU (via teleconference), was a teacher and asked members to fully fund public education, school bond debt reimbursement, and to provide timely and predictable funding for schools. She was seeing chronic underfunding in Alaska's schools. She provided an example. Juneau's elementary schools shared one art teacher among six schools and halftime physical education (P.E.), music, and library teachers. The students in her elementary school had 45 minutes of P.E., and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended 60 minutes of physical activity for children per day. The counselor at her school had twice the recommended load of students (1 counselor for 250 students) - there was one counselor for 500 students. Alaska had a high level of trauma and abuse and was facing a mental health crisis from the pandemic. She urged members to

support education, one of the best investments that could be made for Alaska's future.

10:27:15 AM

Vice-Chair Ortiz thanked the testifier. He heard her speak to the lack of services within her school. He asked if there had been a gradual decline over a number of years or whether the decline had been immediate due to COVID-19

Ms. Walker thought the decline had occurred gradually. She had been teaching for the past two years. She was aware that librarians had been cut to half-time about 13 years prior.

10:28:18 AM

LESLEY ANDERSON, HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER, ALASKA CHILD AND FAMILY, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of increasing the mental health budget. She thought most members were likely familiar with the butterfly effect - the idea that one small change could have a huge impact on the future. The staff of Alaska Child and Family worked diligently to undo the harsh reality of the butterfly effect on students who came to the agency after facing significant trauma in their lives, often from a very young age. Trauma left lasting impressions and impacted children long after any abuse or neglect took place. Alaska Child and Family staff, through daily work, helped to alter the path of the butterfly. She testified that her staff were some of the most selfless people she knew. They were not motivated by money, rather, they wanted to see the changes they could make in students' lives. Many of her staff had 2 or 3 jobs in order to make a livable wage. She suggested that with additional mental health funds her organization could begin to pay its staff more. She asserted that one small change could lead to many more.

10:30:21 AM

JESSICA PLACHTA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LYNN CANAL CONSERVATION, HAINES (via teleconference), called attention to Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA). She asserted that AIDEA had been operating with a free reign and a cloaked process for too long. Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority had been squandering public resources without meaningful public

input. The list of AIDEA's boondoggle projects was long, and she wanted the legislature to ensure that it would not get longer. She continued that AIDEA had responsibility for an ore terminal in Skagway. The Skagway terminal was burdened by a toxic legacy which would be expensive and difficult to clean up. Recently, an AIDEA board member expressed the desire to hand Skagway the keys and walk away. Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority wanted to move on to cleaner pastures in Haines, 17 miles away. Haines needed reliable ferry service and some barge dock repairs. However, it did not need a toxic ore terminal. The only possible location for an ore terminal was in an area at known risk of landslides and tsunamis. She noted the most recent Haines weather disaster. She was concerned with toxins affecting salmon runs, tourism, and the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve. She asserted that if AIDEA was going to be allowed to continue to operate, they needed to consult with the affected communities including Haines, Klukwan, and the surrounding area. She did not want to see Haines end up with a toxic legacy.

[10:32:52 AM](#)

Representative Josephson asked if AIDEA was looking at investing in the Palmer Constantine Mine, an ore terminal in Haines, or both.

Ms. Plachta responded that AIDEA kept its cards close. She had heard that they were interested in moving some of the infrastructure from Skagway to Haines in the area she had described. They were likely in conversations with Palmer as well without making the conversations evident to the public. She also thought AIDEA was in conversations with Yukon Mine regarding shipping ore from the mine to a possible Haines terminal. She did not like the idea.

[10:33:53 AM](#)

NICHOLAS SZATKOWSKA, SELF, HAINES (via teleconference), spoke against the way AIDEA was spending its money. He felt that AIDEA was subsidizing corporations that were not acting in the best interest of Alaskans. He felt the process used by AIDEA was socialistic. Alaska had high needs. He also spoke of the Haines State Forest acting in favor of clear cut logging which did not benefit Haines. He referred to it as a boondoggle. He urged members to reduce

funding for the Haines State Forest to a level that still allowed for local access.

[10:38:22 AM](#)

GAIL HEINEMAN, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), asked members not to cut University funding or draw down the Permanent Fund. She thought Alaska was suffering from a resource curse. She felt that the diversification of Alaska's economy was being neglected in light of the high profits that could be obtained from limited natural resources similar to what happened in Wyoming and West Virginia. Idaho and Texas diversified and had healthy economies. She suggested that Alaska's economy could be diversified by investing in the University which would motivate young people to come to Alaska to attend collage and families to raise their kids in the state. She had read that the American Rescue Plan contained \$33 million for the University of Alaska and more for k-12 schooling. She mentioned the maintenance of effort required and how the compact between the governor and the University's Board of Regents might interfere. She opined that the step cuts instituted by Governor Dunleavy were unconstitutional. She also advised not to draw down the Permanent Fund. She advocated the legislature apply the percent of market value (POMV) law from 2018. She did not want to see the Permanent Fund diminished by making extra draws from the earnings reserve account.

[10:41:18 AM](#)

ELIJAH JACKSON, MAYOR, CITY OF OUZINKIE, OUZINKIE (via teleconference), commented that it had been a rough year for the community and that self-reliance was important in rural Alaska. The City of Ouzinkie had experienced major issues with its generators in recent months. The community's hydro turbine and the switch gear that controlled the communications between the two had created an unwanted reliance on diesel generation. The community had sought funding for the hydro turbine and the switch gear, but both projects were pushed back because of COVID-19. He noted the community had exhausted almost all of its funds rebuilding its generators. He reported the city was paying \$11,000 per month for fuel to run its generators. He asked the legislature to reinstate local the emergency order. He also requested the legislature recapitalize the Community Assistance Fund to \$90 million to provide

stability to local governments in uncertain times. He urged members to avoid cost-shifting and to invest in Alaskans.

[10:43:06 AM](#)

HERMAN MORGAN, SELF, ANIAK (via teleconference), [Note: poor audio quality]. He asked members to support a full PFD. He stated that the people could use the money and it would be a boost to the private economy. He explained that students could put the money away for future education. He did not believe the state could afford Medicaid expansion for all or universal healthcare. He urged the legislature to be careful in accepting federal funding because it came with restrictions. He advocated for budget cuts. He did not want to live like a pauper while the legislature squandered state funding.

[10:46:44 AM](#)

TREVOR STORRS, PRESIDENT, ALASKA CHILDREN'S TRUST ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) federal funding reduction. Children were a valuable resource, but some of them were not treated as such. Some children suffered extreme abuse leading them to attend a child advocacy center. The loss of VOCA funding could greatly impact children's ability to get the support they needed. He noted many of the issues surrounding child abuse and encouraged the legislature to fill the VOCA funding gap. He asserted that children were Alaska's future.

[10:49:23 AM](#)

SUSAN WARNER, SELF, GUSTAVUS (via teleconference), spoke in support of fully funding AMHS. She also advocated fully funding the Community Assistance Program.

[10:50:24 AM](#)

GINA AGRON, SELF, EAGLE RIVER (via teleconference), thanked the finance subcommittee for fully funding the Anchorage Youth Court. She spoke of the benefits that her son experienced through the program. She suggested that the program led to a better appreciation of how each young person fit into the larger community. She continued to discuss the important effects the Anchorage Youth Court had on participants. She asserted that all youth court members benefited from its programs.

10:52:39 AM

AMY LUJAN, LEGISLATIVE LIAISON, ALASKA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS, JUNEAU (via teleconference), thanked members for additional Pre-K funding. She was glad for the additional federal relief funding for the COVID-19 pandemic. She asked members to increase education funding through the base student allocation (BSA), which had been flat-funded at \$5,930 since FY 17. She was grateful the BSA had not been reduced. However, in inflation adjusted terms the BSA was currently more than \$1,100 or 16 percent lower than it was in FY 07. Also, pupil transportation funding had remained flat and was not keeping up with inflation. Less than 10 percent of construction projects in the capital budget had been funded in recent years. She noted school bond debt reimbursement had been reduced which made it difficult to meet the needs of school districts. Alaska needed a broad-based fiscal plan to address the long-term needs of the state. She thought legislators had begun the work when they set up a POMV plan a few years ago. She urged members not to kick the can down the road. A plan was needed to avoid a fiscal cliff.

10:55:23 AM

MINDY HUNTER, PRE-K SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER, HOMER (via teleconference), called in to testify in favor of SB 111, particularly the sunset component. She was asking legislators for real investment in Pre-K into the future. She noted the Pre-K programs helped to prepare students for kindergarten and success. Statistics showed that money was saved with Pre-K education by not needing to provide long-term intervention. She provided a list of skills that resulted from children attending Pre-K programs. Pre-school would influence education through high school. She urged members to support pre-school education robustly into the future.

10:58:26 AM

BRENDA MOORE, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of the operating budget. She thought the budget reflected a desire to care for people in appropriate levels of care rather than in increased crisis care and higher cost institutional care. People who had access to care improved their quality of life. She thanked members for

funding for the behavioral health treatment and recovery grants, frontline social workers, intellectually and developmental disabilities, Medicaid health coverage, sobering centers, Public Assistance field services, the Office of Child Services, Therapeutic Courts, and Civil Legal Services. She urged reconsideration of the use of Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) funding to help fund the budget.

[11:01:45 AM](#)

ED MARTIN, SELF, STERLING (via teleconference), did not appreciate comments made by his representative, Representative Carpenter, about not needing to supply a full dividend or use federal funding. He argued that taking the PFD away from individuals was a terrible idea. He also opposed the legislature kicking the can down the road. He was discouraged by the actions taken by the legislature. He did not feel the University of Alaska should be receiving state funds. Rather, he thought the University should be self-supporting by generating revenue from its lands. He hoped his representative would work hard on behalf of the people in the Kenai Borough. He asked for deeper cuts to the budget. He strongly disagreed with the notion of overheating the economy.

[11:04:29 AM](#)

GREG WEAVER, SELF, WASILLA (via teleconference), spoke against funding AMHS. Alaska was the only state in the nation subsidizing such a service. He advocated for a move of the capital to the road system. There needed to be accountability and citizens from populous areas sitting in the committee rooms. He reiterated his opposition to subsidizing the ferry system. He suggested that no one was forcing people to live in the outlying areas of Alaska.

[11:08:19 AM](#)

DIMITRI SHEIN, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), thanked the legislature for its work. He supported youth court funding at the FY 21 level. He had been caught shop lifting as a teenager and attended the program. It had benefited him by hearing from other young people who had made similar mistakes. He thought the program had brought the number of cases down. He realized there was overhead costs but argued that the program was a good investment. He

provided some personal information related to the successes of going through the youth court program. The proof was in the pudding as he was married, had 4 adopted children, and ran his own non-profit business. He asked members to continue to invest in the program.

11:11:01 AM

WILLY KEPPEL, SELF, QUINHAGAK (via teleconference), was concerned with the PCE program and thought it needed to be reworked, as it only helped with residential services rather than businesses. He thought the program should not focus on kilowatt hours. He indicated PCE had not help businesses such as the local store. He suggested subsidizing fuel costs rather than kilowatt hours.

11:14:14 AM

MICHELE GIRAULT, KEY COALITION OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), advocated reducing the barriers that Alaskans with disabilities experienced. Currently there were over 800 people with intellectual or developmental disabilities who qualified for services but were still waiting for access to funding. The state currently drew 50 people per year. Therefore, the waitlist would continue to be an issue for decades. She spoke of a boy in Cordova who had down syndrome and autism who had been on the waitlist for 8 years. She provided details about the boy's circumstance. There were some members of the coalition who had been on the waitlist from 10 years to 20 years. The coalition thought the timeline was unconscionable. She indicated that some parents had had to go into poverty or give up their children to the Office of Child Services in order to get support for their disabled children. The Key Coalition had worked diligently to change the system so that children with disabilities could live with their families. She applauded Representative Josephson for proposing additional funding that would provide desperately needed services to an additional 20 recipients.

Co-Chair Foster indicated there were no more people waiting to testify. The committee would take an at ease until 11:45 a.m.

11:17:33 AM

AT EASE

[11:46:39 AM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Foster indicated there were no testifiers in the que. He reported that the committee would resume at 12:15 p.m. He provided the email address for anyone wanting to submit written testimony. He also provided call-in numbers for verbal testimony.

[11:48:28 AM](#)

AT EASE

[12:16:45 PM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Foster indicated the committee would continue with public testimony.

[12:17:01 PM](#)

DIANNE MACRAE, SELF, KASILOF (via teleconference), thanked Representative Carpenter for encouraging her to testify. She asked about Medicare monies. Her husband was a Medicare recipient and was disabled. She suggested there was a large chunk of funding available. She thought the state was wasting money. She noted that Medicaid often helped with travel. She suggested that every home should have a blood pressure cuff. She favored telehealth as a cheaper alternative to traveling to receive care. She thought many things could be cut from the budget that were over-funded.

[12:20:38 PM](#)

JENNIFER AUSTIN, PRESIDENT, ALASKA WOMEN'S ALLIANCE, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), advocated for funding for mental and behavioral health. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic things had deteriorated. She spoke of children having to be relocated out of their home. She thought providing behavioral and mental health care to address issues would be beneficial at a time where people felt disconnected. Patient-provider contact was critical in the current pandemic. She also advocated for funding for families and patients around the issue of suicide.

[12:23:54 PM](#)

ABBE HENSLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BEST BEGINNINGS, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), thanked the committee for its continued support for early childhood programs including Head Start, Parents as Teachers, Pre-K grants, and Best Beginnings. She encouraged members to approve the addition of \$5 million to the Pre-K grants allocation from lapsed funds in the residential school program due to COVID-19. She noted that the Imagination Library program, part of Best Beginnings, was very beneficial to children. A recent study showed that children who participated in Imagination Library had higher rates of kindergarten readiness. The study was consistent across student groups. She provided a list of benefits including improved proficiency skills and reading achievement. She thanked the committee for its support for early childhood learning.

[12:27:10 PM](#)

MARSHA THOMASON, SELF, NORTH POLE (via teleconference), was a re-entry case manager. She did not agree with taking monies from the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority reserves to fund the budget. She supported funding for Therapeutic Courts, sobering centers, and behavioral health grants. She asserted that people did better in their lives with support.

Co-Chair Foster indicated the committee would return at 1:00 p.m., as there were no testifiers online presently.

[12:29:42 PM](#)

AT EASE

[1:02:20 PM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Foster relayed that the committee would continue hearing public testimony.

[1:02:41 PM](#)

KATIE BENDER, PRESIDENT, UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ANCHORAGE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BOARD, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for the University of Alaska. She asserted that the University was the state's future.

Co-Chair Foster indicated the committee would return at 1:30 p.m., as there were no further testifiers online. [Another testifier appeared online.]

[1:04:15 PM](#)

SHANNON HUNT, SELF, GEORGIA (via teleconference), had been a victim of domestic violence in Alaska. She was calling regarding the decrease in federal funding. She relayed some statistics around domestic violence. She spoke of the resources that were provided to her after she had been attacked. She urged members to fill the federal funding shortfall with state dollars. It was traumatizing for her to testify, but she did not want to see the agency go without funding. The unserved population that would otherwise be left behind needed additional funding.

Co-Chair Foster thanked Ms. Hunt for her testimony. He noted that at the state level there were a number of entities concerned about the gap in federal funding. There were no further testifiers signed up. The committee would return at 1:40 p.m. to hear further testimony.

[1:08:19 PM](#)

AT EASE

[1:41:07 PM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Foster indicated no one was online to testify.

[1:41:54 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster CLOSED public testimony.

HB 69 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 71 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the schedule for the following meeting.

#

ADJOURNMENT

1:42:21 PM

The meeting was adjourned at 1:42 p.m.