

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

March 30, 2021

9:01 a.m.

[9:01:37 AM](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Bishop called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Click Bishop, Co-Chair
Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair
Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Donny Olson (via teleconference)
Senator Natasha von Imhof (via teleconference)
Senator Bill Wielechowski
Senator David Wilson

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Jared Kosin, Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association, Anchorage; Dr. Elliot Bruhl, Chief Medical Officer, Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC), Sitka; Phil Hofstetter, CEO, Petersburg Medical Center, Petersburg; Tim Strickland, Ketchikan Medical Center, Ketchikan; Cara Durr, Director of Public Engagement, Food Bank of Alaska, Fairbanks; Albert Wall, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Health and Social Services, Juneau; Lisa Aquino, CEO, Catholic Social Services, Anchorage; Laurie Wolf, President and CEO, Foraker Group, Anchorage; Nils Andreassen, Executive Director, Alaska Municipal League, Juneau; Cris Eichenlaub, Self, Wasilla; Mike Coons, Self, Palmer; Vikki Jo Kennedy, Self, Juneau; Herman Morgan, Self, Aniak; Kristina Bego, Self, Willow; Christine Hutchinson, Self, Kenai Peninsula; Teea Winger, Self, Kenai; Willy Keppel, Self, Quinhagak; Francine Reuter, Self, Anchorage; Max Roney, Self, Anchorage.

SUMMARY

CSHB 76 (FIN) am EXTENDING COVID 19 DISASTER EMERGENCY

CSHB 76 (FIN) was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#hb76

CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 76 (FIN) am

"An Act extending the January 15, 2021, governor's declaration of a public health disaster emergency in response to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic; approving and ratifying declarations of a public health disaster emergency; providing for a financing plan; making temporary changes to state law in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in the following areas: occupational and professional licensing, practice, and billing; telehealth; fingerprinting requirements for health care providers; charitable gaming and online ticket sales; access to federal stabilization funds; wills; unfair or deceptive trade practices; meetings of shareholders; and school operating funds; relating to informed consent for COVID-19 vaccines; relating to personal objections to the administration of COVID-19 vaccines; providing immunity from liability and disciplinary action for occupational licensees for exposure of clients to COVID-19; providing immunity from liability for persons engaging in business and their employees for exposure of customers to COVID-19; and providing for an effective date."

[9:03:08 AM](#)

JARED KOSIN, ALASKA STATE HOSPITAL AND NURSING HOME ASSOCIATION, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill. He remarked that Alaska's hospitals and nursing homes viewed the disaster declaration as a legal mechanism that provided tools and resources to combat COVID-19.

[9:05:54 AM](#)

DR. ELLIOT BRUHL, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER, SOUTHEAST ALASKA REGIONAL HEALTH CONSORTIUM (SEARHC), SITKA (via

teleconference), testified in support of the legislation. He stated that he had worked to keep Southeast Alaska safe from COVID-19. He stressed that the emergency status was important to keeping people safe.

[9:09:32 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman wondered whether SEARHC had a position on having COVID-19 testing at the airports.

Dr. Bruhl replied that testing was a key element for maintaining safe communities.

[9:11:35 AM](#)

PHIL HOFSTETTER, CEO, PETERSBURG MEDICAL CENTER, PETERSBURG (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill. He stated that a graph had been provided to the committee (copy on file).

[9:15:06 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman asked about the people who had tested positive for COVID-19 after being vaccinated for the virus.

Mr. Hofstetter replied that the majority of people who contracted COVID-19 were unvaccinated. He furthered that fully vaccinated people could still contract COVID-19.

Senator Hoffman wondered whether vaccinated individuals would not be hospitalized from COVID-19.

Mr. Hofstetter replied that it was non 100 percent, but the vaccines were intended to help prevent severe COVID-19 infections.

Co-Chair Stedman wondered whether any of the seven vaccinated individuals on the list who had contracted COVID-19 went to the hospital.

Mr. Hofstetter replied that none of the individuals were hospitalized.

Co-Chair Stedman queried the type of vaccines administered to those individuals.

Mr. Hofstetter replied that the only vaccines available at that time were Pfizer.

[9:18:02 AM](#)

TIM STRICKLAND, KETCHIKAN MEDICAL CENTER, KETCHIKAN (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill.

[9:21:43 AM](#)

CARA DURR, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, FOOD BANK OF ALASKA, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke in support of the legislation.

Co-Chair Bishop asked that the testimony be provided to the committee.

Ms. Durr agreed to provide the testimony.

Senator Wielechowski queried how many Alaskans used the Enhanced SNAP benefits.

Ms. Durr replied that she did not have specific numbers, but shared that, nationally, 60 percent of families qualified for the Emergency Allotment. She deferred to the department for further numbers.

[9:26:59 AM](#)

ALBERT WALL, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES, JUNEAU (via teleconference), replied that there was a draft response of the number of individuals who were on emergency SNAP benefits, and noted that the number changed monthly. He stated that the number was approximately 34,000 households on average.

Senator Wielechowski queried the timing of the payouts.

Mr. Wall stated the payments were made monthly, but were not all sent out on the same day due to individual processing.

[9:28:46 AM](#)

LISA AQUINO, CEO, CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. She remarked that the bill would help to protect Alaska's most

vulnerable people. She echoed the comments from Ms. Durr. She stressed that, currently, telehealth would be available for Medicaid recipients.

Senator Wielechowski wondered how the temporary assistance for needy family (TANF) was different from SNAP benefits, and whether it was effected by the disaster declaration.

Ms. Aquino did not know the difference between the programs. She stated that TANF rates were typically cut in half in the summer, because of the rate of employment increasing in the summer.

Senator Wielechowski hoped that there could be clarification on the impact of TANF benefits.

Mr. Wall explained that SNAP benefits were considered an entitlement program, and TANF was a temporary assistance. He stated that TANF was not impacted by the disaster declaration.

Co-Chair Bishop asked for a written detail be provided to the committee.

Mr. Wall agreed to provide that information.

Senator Wielechowski surmised that the current disaster declaration would have no impact on future TANF benefits.

Mr. Wall replied in the affirmative.

[9:37:03 AM](#)

LAURIE WOLF, PRESIDENT AND CEO, FORAKER GROUP, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill.

[9:39:41 AM](#)

NILS ANDREASSEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALASKA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE, JUNEAU (via teleconference), testified in support of the legislation, and detailed the impacts on municipalities.

[9:42:48 AM](#)

Co-Chair Bishop OPENED public testimony.

[9:43:00 AM](#)

CRIS EICHENLAUB, SELF, WASILLA (via teleconference), testified in opposition the legislation.

[9:46:05 AM](#)

MIKE COONS, SELF, PALMER (via teleconference), spoke against the bill.

[9:48:45 AM](#)

VIKKI JO KENNEDY, SELF, JUNEAU (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to the legislation. She stated that the governor could call an emergency declaration.

[9:50:57 AM](#)

HERMAN MORGAN, SELF, ANIAK (via teleconference), testified in opposition to the legislation.

[9:54:07 AM](#)

KRISTINA BEGO, SELF, WILLOW (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to the bill. She felt that there was no pandemic.

[9:56:17 AM](#)

CHRISTINE HUTCHINSON, SELF, KENAI PENINSULA (via teleconference), echoed the testifiers' comments who have spoken against the legislation.

[9:59:42 AM](#)

TEEA WINGER, SELF, KENAI (via teleconference), testified in opposition to the legislation.

[10:02:54 AM](#)

WILLY KEPPEL, SELF, QUINHAGAK (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to the bill.

[10:05:38 AM](#)

FRANCINE REUTER, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in opposition to the legislation.

10:07:10 AM

MAX RONEY, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill.

10:08:19 AM

Co-Chair Bishop CLOSED public testimony.

Co-Chair Bishop stated that the amendment deadline was April 1 at 5pm. He discussed the following day's agenda.

CSHB 76(FIN)was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

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ADJOURNMENT

10:09:26 AM

The meeting was adjourned at 10:09 a.m.