

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

March 11, 2021

4:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Mike Shower, Chair
Senator Lora Reinbold, Vice Chair (via teleconference)
Senator Mia Costello

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Roger Holland
Senator Scott Kawasaki

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 83

"An Act relating to elections; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 84

"An Act relating to the veterans' land purchase discount; establishing state land vouchers; relating to the permanent fund dividend; relating to the duties of the Department of Revenue; authorizing the Department of Natural Resources to accept state land vouchers; relating to eligibility for public assistance; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 7

"An Act requiring the Department of Public Safety to publish certain policies and procedures on the department's Internet website."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 12

"An Act relating to temporary courtesy licenses for military spouses; and relating to the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 40

"An Act relating to veterans' benefits services and veterans' benefits appeal services."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 83

SHORT TITLE: ELECTIONS; VOTING; BALLOT REQS

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

02/12/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/12/21	(S)	STA, FIN
03/02/21	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/02/21	(S)	Heard & Held
03/02/21	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/11/21	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 84

SHORT TITLE: LAND VOUCHERS; PFDS

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

02/12/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/12/21	(S)	STA, RES, FIN
03/02/21	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/02/21	(S)	Heard & Held
03/02/21	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/11/21	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 7

SHORT TITLE: STATE TROOPER POLICIES: PUBLIC ACCESS

SPONSOR(s): GRAY-JACKSON

01/22/21	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
01/22/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/21	(S)	STA, JUD
03/04/21	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/04/21	(S)	Heard & Held
03/04/21	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
03/11/21	(S)	STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 12

SHORT TITLE: MILITARY SPOUSE COURTESY LICENSE

SPONSOR (s) : KAWASAKI

01/22/21 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
01/22/21 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/21 (S) STA, L&C
03/04/21 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/04/21 (S) Heard & Held
03/04/21 (S) MINUTE (STA)
03/11/21 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 40

SHORT TITLE: VETERANS' BENEFITS SERVICES; DISCLOSURE

SPONSOR (s) : REVAK

01/25/21 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/15/21
01/25/21 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/25/21 (S) STA, L&C
03/04/21 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/04/21 (S) Heard & Held
03/04/21 (S) MINUTE (STA)
03/11/21 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

MORGAN LIM

Planned Parenthood Votes, Northwest and Hawaii
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 83.

JEANNETTE LEE, Community Democracy Researcher
Sightline Institute
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Suggested changes to SB 83.

KENDRA KLOSTER, Executive Director
Native Peoples Action (NPA)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified that SB 83 needs more work before
it advances.

EDWARD MARTIN, representing self
Cooper Landing, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 84.

MORGAN LIM

Planned Parenthood Votes, Northwest and Hawaii
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 7.

JOMO STEWART, Military Projects Manager
Fairbanks Economic Development Corporation (FEDC)
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 12.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[4:00:26 PM](#)

CHAIR MIKE SHOWER called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Costello, Reinbold (via teleconference) and Chair Shower.

He reviewed the agenda.

SB 83-ELECTIONS; VOTING; BALLOT REQS

[4:01:38 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 83 "An Act relating to elections; and providing for an effective date."

[4:01:57 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER opened public testimony on SB 83.

[4:02:14 PM](#)

MORGAN LIM, Planned Parenthood Votes, Northwest and Hawaii (PPVNH), Juneau, Alaska, stated strong opposition to SB 83 and support for policies that make it convenient for all who are eligible to register to vote and cast a ballot. He opined that SB 83 makes it more difficult to vote by imposing burdensome voter identification requirements on absentee voters and limits in-person voting for communities with a population of 750 or fewer. He characterized SB 83 as "part of a nationwide voter suppression trend as too many politicians try to manipulate the outcome of elections by making it harder to cast a ballot."

[4:04:36 PM](#)

JEANNETTE LEE, Community Democracy Researcher, Sightline Institute, Anchorage, Alaska, suggested the committee reexamine the need for the witness signature as it considers the changes to voter identifying information on absentee ballots. She described it as an unnecessary regulation because it is not clear that this makes the election more secure. She highlighted that documents in the 2020 court case on the topic verified that

the state has no process to check the legitimacy of the witness signatures. When the judge asked whether the requirement had ever played a role in detecting fraud, court documents indicated, "the state could not identify any such instance in recent memory and was not sure whether it had played a role in the distant past."

MS. LEE stated, "Our research has shown that the Division of Election's requirement to provide identifying information like date of birth is a more effective check; and yet, in election after election enforcement of what is essentially an empty gesture has disenfranchised hundreds of eligible absentee voters." She urged the legislature to permanently do away with the regulation and replace it with a robust signature verification process and ballot cure option that allows voters to fix errors on ballot envelopes.

[4:07:29 PM](#)

KENDRA KLOSTER, Executive Director, Native Peoples Action (NPA), Anchorage, Alaska, stated agreement with much of the previous testimony. She said she was pleased that the state did away with the witness signature requirement during the last election and she believes it should be permanent for the reasons that Ms. Lee stated.

MS. KLOSTER described the provision for the only-vote-by-mail option for communities with populations of 750 or less as problematic. She said NPA has done many studies and reports on the need for both a vote by mail and an in-person voting option for all communities. She encouraged working with tribal communities and communities to talk through the different options.

She offered to work with the sponsor or this and subsequent committees to improve the bill.

CHAIR SHOWER suggested she work with his office because his bill, SB 39) incorporates many of the things that testifiers have mentioned.

[4:10:05 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER found no other testifiers and closed public testimony on SB 83.

CHAIR SHOWER held SB 83 in committee.

SB 84-LAND VOUCHERS; PFDS

[4:10:33 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 84 "An Act relating to the veterans' land purchase discount; establishing state land vouchers; relating to the permanent fund dividend; relating to the duties of the Department of Revenue; authorizing the Department of Natural Resources to accept state land vouchers; relating to eligibility for public assistance; and providing for an effective date."

[4:10:43 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER opened public testimony on SB 84.

[4:10:51 PM](#)

EDWARD MARTIN, representing self, Cooper Landing, Alaska, advised that the history of this issue goes back to 1998. The price of oil had dropped to \$12 per barrel and Governor Knowles sought ideas to fix some of the state's fiscal problems. Mr. Martin highlighted that he suggested that getting state land that was sitting idle into the hands of Alaskans would help with the fiscal situation.

MR. MARTIN stated that SB 84 will help the future of the state and the future of Alaska's children by ensuring they have an opportunity to get land for which they can create new wealth and investment. He suggested that retaining the money from the land voucher program in the Earnings Reserve Account (ERA) would help grow larger dividends.

He also commented on quorum requirements and options for doing business during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CHAIR SHOWER mentioned that the committee had a quorum to do business but not to move the bill from committee.

[4:13:44 PM](#)

SENATOR REINBOLD stated that she was attending the meeting remotely but would be happy to return to the committee room to vote to pass bills from committee.

CHAIR SHOWER thanked her for letting the public know she was attending the meeting, just not in the committee room because of policies.

[4:14:34 PM](#)

MARTY PARSONS, Director, Division of Mining, Land, and Water, Anchorage, Alaska, offered to answer questions if the committee had concerns about the effect of the bill.

[4:15:13 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER found no questions or other testifiers and closed public testimony on SB 84.

CHAIR SHOWER held SB 84 in committee.

SB 7-STATE TROOPER POLICIES: PUBLIC ACCESS

[4:15:27 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 7 "An Act requiring the Department of Public Safety to publish certain policies and procedures on the department's Internet website."

[4:15:32 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER opened public testimony on SB 7.

[4:15:52 PM](#)

MORGAN LIM, Planned Parenthood Votes, Northwest and Hawaii, Juneau, Alaska, stated that SB 7 is a first step to ensure accountability in policing to better serve Alaskans. He opined that that the police that we know need to be reimagined and held accountable to be in Alaska. He said the health and safety of patients is PPVNH's first priority whether they are in the office or elsewhere. "We know our patients of color, especially our Black and Indigenous patients, live in a society in which law enforcement disproportionately target and harass their communities," he said. He urged the dismantling of the systemic racism that permeates public institutions, including both the criminal justice system and the healthcare system. He concluded that requiring the public display the policies and procedures related to the peace officers' code of conduct helps in ensuring accountability and is a step in the right direction.

[4:18:33 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER found no further testifiers and closed public testimony on SB 7.

[SB 7 was held in committee.]

SB 12-MILITARY SPOUSE COURTESY LICENSE

[4:19:19 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 12 "An Act relating to temporary courtesy licenses for military spouses; and relating to the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development."

[4:19:41 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER opened public testimony on SB 12.

[4:19:51 PM](#)

JOMO STEWART, Military Projects Manager, Fairbanks Economic Development Corporation (FEDC), Fairbanks, Alaska, stated support for SB 12 that modifies the state's professional licensing regime to recognize licenses earned in other jurisdictions and increasing legislative oversight for the special accommodation of military spouse licenses already existing in the system.

MR. STEWART reported that in February 2018 the secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force jointly sent a letter to the nation's governors advising of the Military Support of Families Initiative and the intent to make quality of education and professional license portability a larger consideration in future basing considerations. In 2019, the Air Force released score cards for all 50 states and Alaska ranked behind 35 states for military spouse license portability.

MR. STEWARD stated that the responses to the initiative have been dismally low and FEDC hopes that strengthening departmental reporting requirements and legislative oversight of temporary licenses will help generate greater response. He added that FEDC also believes that Alaska would benefit from legislation to improve licensure portability generally.

CHAIR SHOWER noted that Sara Chambers with the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED) was available online to answer questions.

[4:22:26 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER closed public testimony on SB 12.

CHAIR COSTELLO stated strong support for Senator Kawasaki's efforts embodied in SB 7. She highlighted that the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee introduced a committee bill on licensure and that Senator Revak is also very interested in the process. She emphasized that improving the process for individuals to receive professional licensure in order to work in Alaska is a priority. She noted that she and others discussed this with the

Governor just this morning. She agreed with the previous caller that this needs to be addressed in a number of ways.

CHAIR SHOWER agreed that it was important for the state long term.

[4:23:48 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER held SB 12 in committee for future consideration.

SB 40-VETERANS' BENEFITS SERVICES; DISCLOSURE

[4:23:53 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 40 "An Act relating to veterans' benefits services and veterans' benefits appeal services."

[4:24:02 PM](#)

At ease

[4:24:22 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER reconvened the meeting and opened public testimony on SB 40. Finding no one who wished to testify, he closed public testimony.

[4:24:40 PM](#)

CHAIR SHOWER held SB 40 in committee for future consideration.

[4:25:02 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Shower adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 4:25 p.m.