

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 28, 2024

8:00 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative CJ McCormick, Chair  
Representative Kevin McCabe, Vice Chair  
Representative Tom McKay  
Representative Thomas Baker  
Representative Rebecca Himschoot  
Representative Donna Mears

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Justin Ruffridge

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 337

"An Act establishing 4-H Day."

- MOVED HB 337 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 133

"An Act exempting municipal service area boards from the requirements of the Open Meetings Act; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 168

"An Act relating to alcohol; relating to local option elections; relating to the statewide database of alcohol purchases; relating to alcohol licenses, endorsements, and permits; relating to municipal regulation and taxation of alcoholic beverages; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 337

SHORT TITLE: ESTABLISHING 4-H DAY

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) MEARS

02/20/24 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
02/20/24 (H) CRA  
03/28/24 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

BILL: HB 133

SHORT TITLE: PUBLIC MEETINGS: EXEMPT MUNI SVC AREA BD  
SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) SUMNER

03/27/23 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
03/27/23 (H) CRA, STA  
04/27/23 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124  
04/27/23 (H) Heard & Held  
04/27/23 (H) MINUTE(CRA)  
03/28/24 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

BILL: HB 168

SHORT TITLE: ALCOHOL SALES: LOCAL OPTION  
SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) FOSTER

04/24/23 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
04/24/23 (H) CRA, FIN  
03/28/24 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

**WITNESS REGISTER**

ARIEL SVETLIK, Staff  
Representative Donna Mears  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the sectional analysis for HB 337, on behalf of Representative Mears, prime sponsor.

YAQUINA REPNOW, representing self  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 337.

ELLE GIFFORD, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 337.

REPRESENTATIVE JESSE SUMNER  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented HB 133.

CLARK BICKFORD, Staff  
Representative Jesse Sumner  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the sectional analysis for HB 133, on behalf of Representative Sumner, prime sponsor.

JILL PARSON, board member  
Big Lake Road Services Area  
Big Lake, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 133.

SANDRA MOLLER, Director  
Division of Community and Regional Affairs  
Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided brief comments during the meeting on HB 133.

PAUL LABOLLE, Staff  
Representative Neal Foster  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 168 on behalf of Representative Foster, prime sponsor.

JOAN WILSON, Director  
Alcohol and Marijuana Control Board  
Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Offered comments during the hearing on HB 168.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:00:50 AM](#)

**CHAIR MCCORMICK** called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Representatives McKay, Baker, Himschoot, Mears, McCabe, and McCormick were present at the call to order.

#### **HB 337-ESTABLISHING 4-H DAY**

[8:01:41 AM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 337, "An Act establishing 4-H Day."

[8:02:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MEARS, prime sponsor, presented HB 4. She read from the following prepared remarks [original punctuation provided]:

Honorable members of the committee, I am here before you today to advocate for the formal recognition of 4-H Day in the State of Alaska on the first Wednesday of October.

As Representatives, we are all deeply invested in the well-being and future of our communities, and as the 4-H motto states, "To make the best better". I believe acknowledging and celebrating the invaluable contributions of the 4-H program is an act that aligns itself with these stated values.

Most of you are likely to be familiar with 4-H from the Youth in Governance Program who visited the Capitol last month, or from projects, produce, or livestock being shown at the Alaska State Fair, but did you know kids get to become members of local 4-H clubs like Fairbanks's 40 Below Mooskateers and the Sitka Spruce Tips?

For me, 4-H has been part of my life since I was young—maybe because my parents were dear friends with our local county 4-H agent, Ted Blum. I think 4-H helped prepare me for serving in the legislature, because I started attending 4-H Prep meetings in kindergarten.

Similar to my experience, since its first chapter in Alaska, 4-H has been empowering young individuals across our state, fostering leadership, responsibility, and a commitment to service.

One of the first things 4-H'ers learn when they join a club is the 4-H pledge:

I pledge my head to clearer thinking,  
my heart to greater loyalty,

my hands to larger service,  
and my health to better living, for my club, my  
community, my country, and my world.  
As you can see from this pledge, 4-H isn't just  
limited to livestock.

Through its hands-on experiential learning  
opportunities, 4-H equips our youth with essential  
life skills, preparing them to thrive in an ever-  
changing world. At the heart of 4-H lies its  
commitment to nurturing the next generation of  
leaders. By engaging in projects spanning agriculture,  
food security, STEM, health, civic engagement,  
agricultural skills, fisheries, applied arts, and  
beyond, participants develop critical thinking,  
problem-solving, and communication skills essential  
for success in any endeavor they pursue. I bet the  
Seward Sea Otters and the North Pole Ptarmigans are  
learning a variety of different skills that can only  
be found in their home communities.

Moreover, 4-H instills its members a sense of civic  
duty and responsibility, shaping them into active and  
engaged citizens dedicated to making positive  
contributions to society. We all saw this firsthand  
last month during the Youth in Governance Capitol  
visit!

Beyond its educational merits, 4-H serves as a  
catalyst for community development and resilience. How  
could you not care about your community if you were a  
proud member of the Knick River Riders or the Funny  
River Lynx? By promoting collaboration and  
cooperation, 4-H strengthens the fabric of our  
communities, creating spaces where individuals can  
come together to address local challenges and effect  
meaningful change. In a state as large and diverse as  
Alaska, this takes shape in so many different ways.  
Our unique communities have many different cultural  
and regional skills to share with our youth.

Furthermore, 4-H plays a pivotal role in cultivating a  
deep appreciation for our state's unique agricultural  
heritage and natural resources. I've been working on  
food security with the Food Strategy Task Force, and I  
can say that the skills and connection to local  
knowledge kids are gaining in 4-H for their local and

regional food practices are essential. Clubs like the Mat-Su's Grow 'em and Show 'em and the Big Lake Back Yard are doing an amazing job growing this local connection to the food we put on our tables every day. There's an early food connection for me, too. My mom was a 4-H leader of a club called Sewing Scissors, and one of the skills I developed when I was in 4-H is baking - I recall willing my dough to rise in the back of the family station wagon during our county 4-H Fair. Thank you, Mom.

I actually baked this morning, and there is bread in my office for after this committee meeting. 4-H skills stick with you.

By connecting young people with the land and teaching them the importance of sustainable practices, 4-H fosters stewardship and environmental consciousness, ensuring the preservation of Alaska's rich natural heritage and regional knowledge and expertise for generations to come.

In recognizing 4-H Day, we honor the volunteers, educators, and supporters who make the program possible. Recognizing 4-H's impact sends a strong message of support and encouragement to our state's promising young individuals and underscores our commitment to youth and community investment.

In conclusion, I urge you to join me in championing the passage of this legislation to establish 4-H Day in our state. Together, let us celebrate the transformative power of 4-H and commit ourselves to ensuring that every young person has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.

Thank you.

[8:07:41 AM](#)

ARIEL SVETLIK, Staff, Representative Donna Mears, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Mears, prime sponsor of HB 337, presented the sectional analysis [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Sec. 1. - Amends AS 44.12 by adding a new section, 44.12.106, establishing the first Wednesday of October each year as 4-H Day.

[8:08:22 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[8:09:05 AM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK opened invited testimony.

[8:09:17 AM](#)

YAQUINA REPNOW, representing self, gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 337. She shared her personal experience participating in 4-H for the past four years, crediting it for improving her leadership, teamwork, and public speaking. She said 4-H boosts kids' confidence, gets them out of their comfort zones, and helps them be more successful. She concluded that a statewide 4-H Day would help promote 4-H and get more kids involved in the program.

[8:10:50 AM](#)

ELLE GIFFORD, representing self, gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 337. She shared her personal experience participating in 4-H, adding that the bill would unite "4-H'ers" and spread awareness about the program. She stated that 4-H has connected her to her community and taught her how to give back.

[8:13:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE moved to report HB 337 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 337 was reported from the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

[8:13:27 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:13 a.m. to 8:16 a.m.

**HB 133-PUBLIC MEETINGS: EXEMPT MUNI SVC AREA BD**

[8:16:22 AM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 133, "An Act exempting municipal service area boards from the requirements of the Open Meetings Act; and providing for an effective date."

[8:16:34 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JESSE SUMNER, Alaska State Legislature, prime sponsor, presented HB 133. He paraphrased the sponsor statement [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

House Bill 133 would give specific exemptions to local municipalities on the Open Meetings Act.

Currently, the Open Meetings Act (OMA) doesn't allow for Board Supervisors on the Road, Safety and Assessment (RSA) board to ride in the same vehicle, because of the quorum statute in OMA. For example, in the Mat-Su Borough, RSA is an advisory only position appointed by the Mayor. These positions are strictly voluntary; with no power to contract or spend any of the Borough's money.

Not only would this change incentivize local board members; which has been a problem filling, but in the Mat-Su Valley, it is critical to get all the Supervisors together and brainstorm on how best to solve Borough issues, without the cloud of the OMA.

Currently, in practice, if a board member found out something wrong with a road, he or she does not have the ability to call others on the board to come look at said problem and discuss solutions on solving the issue, because of the Open Meetings Act. This is a big problem for local municipalities with an easy solution set forth in this bill.

Please join us in supporting HB 133.

[8:18:29 AM](#)

CLARK BICKFORD, Staff, Representative Jesse Sumner, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Sumner, prime sponsor of HB 133, presented the sectional analysis [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section I:

Just a small grammatical amendment AS 44.62.310(d)(5) from UPON to ON.

And

Removes a portion of AS 44.62.310(d)(8) to ultimately read "meetings of municipal service area boards established under AS 29.35.450 - 29.35.490." This is the heart of the Bill that will give the power back to local municipalities to function reasonable in deciding on how best to problem-solve and not be in violation of the Open Meetings Act.

Section II:

If passed, this would take effect immediately under AS 01.10.070<sup>©</sup>.

CHAIR MCCORMICK opened invited testimony.

[8:19:49 AM](#)

JILL PARSON, board member, Big Lake Road Services Area (RSA), gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 133. She informed the committee that she was a member of the Big Lake RSA board of supervisors, adding that the Open Meetings Act (OMA) greatly hindered the board's ability to observe road issues in a timely manner and research possible solutions. Ideally, she explained that the board would like to be able to ride together in one van with the borough road maintenance superintendent to view and discuss road problems as a group. This way, options and research could be conducted more efficiently while learning from other board members in preparation for the quarterly meetings. However, subject to the OMA, supervisors must drive in three separate cars so that no one car has a board majority during a "ride around," which is far more time consuming. She said RSA supervisors welcomed more efficient ways to handle their responsibilities and preparation for regularly scheduled meetings.

CHAIR MCCORMICK sought questions from committee members.

[8:23:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MEARS asked whether the bill would be limited to these types of boards.

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER answered yes.

REPRESENTATIVE MEARS asked whether the bill would impact boards all across the state or only those in Matanuska-Susitna ("Mat-Su").

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER said the bill would apply to municipal service area boards established under AS 29.35.450 - AS 29.35.490. He added that a forthcoming amendment would make the exemption even more narrowly tailored.

[8:24:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT sought to confirm that the bill would remove the language "when meeting solely to act on matters that are administrative or managerial in nature."

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER confirmed. He noted that rather than removing the language in question, a forthcoming amendment would add one more exception for fact finding missions.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said she supported the bill's intent, but wanted to make sure that it was being done properly.

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER stated that the Mat-Su borough was particularly cautious about violating the OMA, as it was the only municipality with a standing injunction for OMA violations.

[8:26:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT sought to verify that the OMA was a state law, so exemptions could not be made without changing state statute.

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER answered yes, any exemption would need to be made through statute.

[8:27:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BAKER shared his understanding that under the OMA, a meeting can be held as long as 24 hours' notice is given. He asked, "Is there a specific reason for this kind of board, why they had to go a month out because of the cancelled meeting ... 'meeting for the record.'"

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER shared his understanding that it required at least two weeks to notice a meeting because of the timing requirements for publication.

[8:29:05 AM](#)

SANDRA MOLLER, Director, Division of Community and Regional Affairs, Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development (DCCED), stated that there was strong interest in maintaining the OMA and looked forward to hearing amendments.

[8:29:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked for examples of other municipal service area boards.

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER stated that fire service area boards are the most common.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether the bill would apply to all service area boards.

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER answered yes.

[8:30:44 AM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK announced that HB 133 would be held over.

**HB 168-ALCOHOL SALES: LOCAL OPTION**

[8:31:09 AM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 168, "An Act relating to alcohol; relating to local option elections; relating to the statewide database of alcohol purchases; relating to alcohol licenses, endorsements, and permits; relating to municipal regulation and taxation of alcoholic beverages; and providing for an effective date."

[8:31:26 AM](#)

PAUL LABOLLE, Staff, Representative Neal Foster, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Foster, prime sponsor, presented HB 168. He paraphrased the sponsor statement [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

House Bill 168 adds a new local option regarding the sale of alcohol. Currently, communities that want to operate an alcohol beverage store must operate all alcohol sales venues (for example, bars and restaurants that sell alcohol). House Bill 168 allows communities to operate an alcohol beverage store while leaving establishments like bars and restaurants in private hands.

[8:33:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT questioned the genesis of the bill.

MR. LABOLLE stated that the bill was brought to [Representative Foster] by a constituent who had noticed a problem with vagrancy in his/her town, which was generated by people frequenting liquor stores. The constituent believed that the municipality could do a better job at controlling the sale of alcohol but did not want to infringe on the licensed restaurant and bar owners in the private sector.

[8:34:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MEARS asked how local communities were responding to the bill.

MR. LABOLLE said one city council that he spoke with was interested in the idea but not pushing for it.

REPRESENTATIVE MEARS highlighted the importance of gathering feedback from the communities that would be impacted.

MR. LABOLLE replied that he viewed the bill as the beginning of the conversation.

[8:35:13 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether the bill would undercut the decisions of the local community.

MR. LABOLLE clarified that the bill would add - not modify - a local option.

CHAIR MCCORMICK invited Ms. Wilson to speak to the bill.

[8:36:39 AM](#)

JOAN WILSON, Director, Alcohol and Marijuana Control Board, Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development (DCCED), conveyed that community of Nome, which allowed for private ownership of alcoholic beverage licenses, was having trouble with public intoxication. She explained that private owners of the local package stores worked with city council to draft a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that restricted the sale and volume of alcohol. She reported that as a result of the MOU, the problem had greatly dissipated. With regard to the bill, she expressed concern that the two [package stores in Nome] would lose their licenses should it pass. Nonetheless, she stated that neither the Alcohol and Marijuana Control Board ("the board") nor the governor had a position on HB 168, except her own concern for capitalism. She added that there is a strong interest in allowing the people in local communities to choose what's right for them. She reported that the board took the issue in Nome very seriously and considered denying the renewal of both package stores, which spawned the importance of the MOU. She added that the board, the city council, and the package store worked well together.

[8:40:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked how many communities would be impacted by the bill.

MS. WILSON said any community could participate. She shared her belief that larger hub cities, such as Bethel, Kotzebue, and Nome would be the most interested in the proposal.

[8:42:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BAKER added additional context about his hometown of Kotzebue. He recalled that in 2010 or 2011, the city went from being a damp community to a wet community with a municipal owned and operated package store and the ambition to open a bar and grill as a local option, which was a difficult task for the municipality.

[8:43:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE pointed out that last time [the legislature] tried to amend Title 4 it took nine years with Senator Micciche's Senate Bill 9.

[8:44:25 AM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK announced that HB 168 would be held over.

[8:44:54 AM](#)

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 8:44 a.m.