

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
March 22, 2023  
2:37 p.m.

2:37:54 PM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Johnson called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 2:37 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Bryce Edgmon, Co-Chair  
Representative Neal Foster, Co-Chair  
Representative DeLena Johnson, Co-Chair  
Representative Julie Coulombe  
Representative Mike Cronk  
Representative Alyse Galvin  
Representative Sara Hannan  
Representative Andy Josephson  
Representative Dan Ortiz  
Representative Will Stapp  
Representative Frank Tomaszewski

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Gina Schumaker, Alaska Center for FASD, Anchorage; Michael Jeffery, Alaska Center for FASD, Utqiagvik; Brian Ridley, Chief Chairman, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Eagle; Danielle Logan, Self, Fairbanks.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Kara Carlson, Deputy Director, Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living, Fairbanks LIO; Ana Barbosa, Victims Services Director, Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living, Fairbanks; Brother Tom Patmor, Community of Clam Culch, Clam Culch; Susanna Litwiniak, President, Kenai Peninsula Educational Support Association, Moose Pass; Jim Williams, Mayor's Office, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Fairbanks; Winter Marshall-Allen, Self, Homer; Kira Eckenweiler, Administrative Director, Behavioral Health

Services, Norton Sound Health Corp, Unalakleet; Sue Sherif, Self, Fairbanks; Margaret Henson, President, Northwest Arctic Borough School District, Kotzebue; Eileen Arnold, Tundra Womens Coalition, Bethel; Roseann Eban, Self, Bethel; Ellen Ganley, Self, Fairbanks; Maggie Winston, Self, Kenai; Keisha Simmons, Self, Fairbanks; George Pierce, Self, Kasilof; Sarah Sears, Self, Bethel; Nathan Erfurth, President, Kenai Peninsula Education Association, Kenai; Jaela Milford, Self, Bethel; Patricia Lee, Self, Fairbanks LIO; Nicole Bowers, Self, Juneau; Kathleen Douglass, Self, Kotzebue; Alana Greear, Self, Kachemak Selo; Andy Degraw, Chief Operations Officer, Fairbanks North Star School District, Fairbanks; Zacary Nelson, Self, Fairbanks; David Brighton, Self, Kenai; June Rogers, City Council Member, City of Fairbanks, Fairbanks; Marie Franich, Self, Fairbanks; Sandi Ryan, President, Fairbanks Education Association, Fairbanks.

#### SUMMARY

HB 39        APPROP: OPERATING BUDGET/LOANS/FUND; SUPP

HB 39 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 41        APPROP: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET

HB 41 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Johnson reviewed the meeting agenda. She reviewed public testimony protocol and call-in information.

#hb39

#hb41

#### HOUSE BILL NO. 39

"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. 41

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

[2:40:46 PM](#)

^PUBLIC TESTIMONY: FAIRBANKS, DELTA JUNCTION, KENAI, BETHEL, CORDOVA, KOTZEBUE, NOME, UTQIAGVIK

[2:40:48 PM](#)

GINA SCHUMAKER, ALASKA CENTER FOR FASD (ACFF), ANCHORAGE, supported funding for aging and disabilities. She shared her personal story with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). She communicated that she was on the ACFF board and discussed her career and what the center's mission. She explained that she was diagnosed with FASD at age 50 and had always felt that something was wrong with her because she learned differently than others. She shared details about her personal life. She was reluctant to share her invisible disability with others in the workplace because of the difficulty people with disabilities had finding jobs. She spoke in support for the Alaska Mental Health Trust's (AMHTA) recommendation for \$300,000 and \$250,000 for aging and disability centers in the Department of Health (DOH) and for \$1,500,000 for the Crisis Now Continuum of Care. She thanked the committee.

[2:43:14 PM](#)

MICHAEL JEFFERY, ALASKA CENTER FOR FASD, UTQIAGVIK, spoke in favor of funding for disability services. He shared his life experience and noted that he had been a Superior Court Judge for 36 years and had experience working with FASD. He reported that FASD was an invisible disability. In his prior career he realized that there were many people who had needs for adaptation, but it was not visible, and he was unaware of the issue. He had to change his approach to his work. He asked the committee to support the AMHTA's recommended amount for the Aging & Disability Resource Centers (ADRC). The Crisis Now Continuum of Care within DOH, and wholistic defense within the Public Defender Agency. He believed that all of the items helped provide important services for individuals that needed adaptations to live their lives.

[2:45:25 PM](#)

KARA CARLSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, INTERIOR ALASKA CENTER FOR NON-VIOLENT LIVING, FAIRBANKS LIO (via teleconference), testified in support of increased funding for the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA) in the Department of Public Safety (DPS) for victim services. She indicated that the budget included a one-time increment of \$3 million in General Funds (GF) and \$3.5 million in federal funding for victim services. She was grateful for the one-time increase but emphasized that utilities and expenses had increased for the center, but funding had not. She hoped the committee could find adequate funding going forward. She was in support of two additional positions for the Violent Crimes Compensation Board (VCCB). She believed that when victims were compensated in a timely manner it facilitated healing. In addition, she requested increased support in the areas of domestic violence prevention and accountability of offenders through prevention programs that were crucial in changing societal and community norms to help break the cycle of violence.

[2:47:41 PM](#)

ANA BARBOSA, VICTIMS SERVICES DIRECTOR, INTERIOR ALASKA CENTER FOR NON-VIOLENT LIVING, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified in support of CDVSA's victims' support services in DPS. She relayed that the center had been struggling with staff retention and had experienced a high turnover rate. Staff was working long hours without additional compensation to keep up with the increased workload. The center was unable to hire more staff to provide its wide range of services and support employee morale and workload. The cost of living had increased significantly, and the center's average employee was unable to sustain itself on the current salary. She believed that a long-term solution for the agency's budget was needed. She emphasized the importance of programs in violence prevention and developing new programs to decrease crime in the state and advocated for more support in these areas.

[2:50:15 PM](#)

BRIAN RIDLEY, CHIEF CHAIRMAN, TANANA CHIEFS CONFERENCE, EAGLE, requested support for an increase in the K-12 Base Student Allocation (BSA) and for inflation proofing the education budget. He related that he was not only

testifying on behalf of the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) but also the Alaska Regional Coalition (ARC), a consortium of four Alaska regional native nonprofit organizations and one regional tribe that represented 101 tribes and 65 thousand Alaskans around the state. The conference supported increased public education funding including inflation proofing and indicated that lacking inflation proofing amounted to funding cuts. The coalition also supported early childhood programs including \$5 million for Head Start and cultural specialists for The Alaska Reads Act. In addition, the coalition supported funding in the Department of Health to eliminate the SNAP backlog and upgrade its computer systems. The organization supported expanded Medicaid Postpartum Care services and requested enhanced support for behavioral health services not covered by the 1115 Medicaid waiver. Lastly, the coalition supported the enhancement of the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program by 10 officers for \$2.8 million, the VPSO director position, and proposed increase for rural trooper housing. He asked the committee to consider ways to maximize federal infrastructure grants in the capital budget.

[2:53:53 PM](#)

Representative Cronk thanked Chief Ridley for his testimony in person.

[2:54:10 PM](#)

BROTHER TOM PATMOR, COMMUNITY OF CLAM CULCH, CLAM CULCH (via teleconference), spoke in support of road improvements for his community. He shared that the community had no stores, church, communal buildings, or other infrastructure except for one road. He explained that the road in the community was the only public access to the beach and during clam digging season over 2 thousand people a day used the road. The road was designated for two lanes but there were several places it was too narrow for both cars and had no guardrails. He noted that the road was dangerous and shared personal experience of a perilous situation where people could have died. He indicated that it would be the perfect year to fix the road.

[2:57:00 PM](#)

Co-Chair Johnson recognized Representative Justin Ruffridge in the audience.

[2:57:43 PM](#)

SUSANNA LITWINIAK, PRESIDENT, KENAI PENINSULA EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT ASSOCIATION (PESA), MOOSE PASS (via teleconference), testified in support of a BSA increase. She shared that she was a secretary in a public school and the mother of a student in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD). She requested a meaningful increase in the education budget in order to retain vital and essential support staff that served schools in a number of capacities that included administrative support, custodians, and nurses. She related that individuals were leaving the district because they could not afford to work there. She believed that students lost a "sense of belonging in their schools" when they lose support staff that carried out vital school functions. She spoke of the residual effects of insufficient support staff on remaining staff that included burnout, which created even more vacancies. Due to the anticipated budget deficit, the district was considering cutting school managers and theatre technicians. She asked for a meaningful increase for education in consideration of the impacts budget shortfalls imposed on students, essential support staff, and the community.

[3:00:10 PM](#)

JIM WILLIAMS, MAYOR'S OFFICE, FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH (FNSB), FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke in favor of community assistance, school debt reimbursement, and a BSA increase. He informed the committee that the mayor's office was in the process of writing next year's education and overall budget. He highlighted the impacts of inflation, workforce, and interest rates on the community. They were working to bring down mill rates and create a frugal budget. He spoke in support of community assistance in the amount of \$30 million, full school debt reimbursement, and a BSA increase. He noted it had been seven years since there had been an increase in the BSA and added inflation was eating up school funds. The community was unable to contribute enough to makeup for inflation and he requested the state increase BSA funding.

Representative Stapp thanked Mr. Williams for testifying.

3:03:19 PM

WINTER MARSHALL-ALLEN, SELF, HOMER (via teleconference), testified in support of education funding. She agreed with the prior caller about the detrimental effects of losing support and certified education staff. There were currently over 2,100 certified positions open statewide. She reminded the committee that the Department of Education and Early Development's (DEED) motto was to "reach, teach, and inspire," was not happening under the current fiscal situation. She stated the squeeze of inflation was impacting schools and direct services to Alaskans. She believed it was imperative the state find new revenue streams. She emphasized that the state's financial problems were increasingly compounding. She had observed teachers leaving the state 10 years prior and thought the situation did not provide stability nor a quality education to students. She requested adequate funding for education and all support services in the state and asked the legislature to help communities find solutions that would make a difference.

3:06:19 PM

KIRA ECKENWEILER, ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR, BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES, NORTON SOUND HEALTH CORP, UNALAKLEET (via teleconference), supported behavioral health services. She discussed the benefits of growing up in a small rural community, yet acknowledged there were also issues. She shared that she knew 20 individuals who had taken their lives. She had lost family to murder and substance abuse. She had experienced many things she did not want children to experience and wanted her community to thrive. She reported on the difficulty people experience when attempting to receive care. She stated that 50 percent of her clients were on acute care and went to Emergency Rooms (ER) for mental health and substance abuse issues. Funding from the state was vital to help fund mental health clinicians, build substance abuse prevention programs, and help the community feel empowered. She emphasized that the work was "not a moneymaking business."

3:08:33 PM

SUE SHERIF, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified against the elimination of \$403,700 for the Public Library Assistance Grant program. She characterized the cut as

"devastating." She relayed that she founded the Healy library and had worked with the state's rural libraries for 9 years. She knew the impact the reduction would bring to the state library program. She indicated that the cut would be detrimental to small community based libraries where the \$7,000 grant represented 50 percent of their annual operating budget that included maintaining at least 10 hours of services each week. She added that most of the small community libraries survived on the state grant as well as matching grants from other sources, fund raisers, volunteers, and lots of community support and did not have the funding larger urban libraries had through property tax. The small libraries were a bargain to the state providing learning, cultural programs, reading materials, and internet access in rural areas. She emphasized that there was no waste to be cut. The modest program should be a point of pride in a high cost state and not a target for budget cuts. She spoke of the effectiveness of the grant. She also requested \$635,000 for the Statewide Library Electronic Doorway (SLED) program.

Representative Galvin thanked Ms. Sherif for helping legislators to understand that a rural library operates differently than an urban library and placed them in the context of how their services provide critically needed opportunities in those communities.

Representative Josephson asked Ms. Sherif for a description of the SLED program. Ms. Sherif answered that the SLED program was an online database where the digital resources allowed people all over the state to get authentic and authoritative information versus just googling the information and reinforced the work of rural libraries. She stressed that it was a vital resource for people living in communities without a library.

[3:13:03 PM](#)

MARGARET HENSON, PRESIDENT, NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT, KOTZEBUE (via teleconference), testified in support of an increase to education funding. She supported an increase to the BSA to \$7,210 on behalf of the 2 thousand students in her district. She referenced the governor's initiative to recruit, attract, and retain qualified teachers however, the school districts growing financial crisis was being ignored. She shared that COVID funding; the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency

Relief Fund (ESSER Fund), had helped the district pay for Pre-K, counselors, major maintenance, and critical personnel over the past three years as well as \$1 million to provide school lunches. She reported that the ESSER funding was no longer available to cover the program shortfalls and the district was facing a \$1 million deficit. She emphasized that the state could not continue to ignore the education financial crisis. She asked the state to take care of its most valuable resource - its children. She urged support for the funding increase.

[3:15:58 PM](#)

Co-Chair Edgmon temporarily chaired the meeting and reminded individuals of the two-minute testimony limit.

EILEEN ARNOLD, TUNDRA WOMENS COALITION (TWC), BETHEL (via teleconference), testified in support for CDVSA's victim's services in the DPS budget. She shared that over 900 people sought services from TWC in 2022. She listed all of the services TWC provided including shelter, teen advocacy, youth advocacy, housing vouchers and assistance, and outreach and education. She reported that it could be difficult to get a law enforcement response in rural Alaska and people could turn to victims' services in communities where law enforcement was lacking. The agency spent over \$10,000 on heating fuel in January in addition to increased food costs and not accounting for the increases represented a loss to the program. She believed that victims and survivors deserved excellent advocates and TWC had to pay competitive salaries in the region. She noted that staff turnover dropped when TWC increased its wages. She asked the committee to consider victims' services in the budget.

[3:18:38 PM](#)

ROSEANN EBAN, SELF, BETHEL (via teleconference), supported funding for CDVSA and shared that she was a domestic violence survivor. She appreciated all of the help she received when she and her son arrived at TWC and emphasized that the organization saved her life.

Representative Galvin thanked Ms. Eban for having the courage to share her story.

[3:20:22 PM](#)

ELLEN GANLEY, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified in support of the Medicaid Self-Directed Care Services program for seniors and disabled persons. She explained that the program's services were typically provided through agencies, which tended to slow services down and was especially needed in rural communities lacking care workers and where family and friends could be employed by the person needing home support and paid through the Medicaid program directly. She indicated that there were cost savings associated with the program and many senior and disabled people wished to remain in their home. Assisted living and institutional care cost more than the self-directed care programs. She supported an amendment to the budget to support the first year's development of a program and after that it would be a waiver program with no impact to the state.

[3:23:27 PM](#)

MAGGIE WINSTON, SELF, KENAI (via teleconference), testified in favor of spending on Medicaid services. She relayed that she relied on Medicaid services and supported the governor's \$1.5 million increment that supported independent living centers in the Senior and Disability Services (SDS) Community Based Grant program versus relying on costly nursing facilities. She thanked the committee for its support. She was pleased for the growing awareness in the legislature about participant self-directed care services. She voiced that the option would allow her to have more autonomy and control over her services and it addressed crucial workforce issues. She favored an additional increment for SDS self-directed services.

[3:24:56 PM](#)

KEISHA SIMMONS, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), supported disability funding. She shared that she was paralyzed from the chest down resulting from an accident at 15 years of age. Prior to her waiver, her mom and sister were doing everything for her at home. Her Medicaid waiver enabled her mother and sister to have successful careers. She had been able to get a master's degree from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and was gainfully employed for 21 years. She believed that people with disabilities are "more reliable and work harder" because they had to "fight" to be employed. The Medicaid waiver had been incredible for her and her family whom all turned into

productive taxpayers. She currently had caregivers that came to her home and got her out in the community. She was an active volunteer in the community. She expressed sadness because she had considered moving into a nursing home because of the shortage of caregivers. She reported that it was even sadder for families without a waiver because the waiting list was so long. There was a real crisis in the caregiving world due to low wages. She also supported participant directed Medicaid services and funding to help increase caregiver salaries. She urged the committee to fund disability services.

[3:28:46 PM](#)

GEORGE PIERCE, SELF, KASILOF (via teleconference), opposed any increases in the budget. He indicated that the following year's budget would comprise 65 percent of state revenue from the Permanent Fund and roughly 30 percent to 35 percent from oil revenue. He believed that Alaska needed to recover from "excessive government spending." He pointed out that the price of oil fluctuated. He opposed the salary increase for legislators. He believed that Undesignated General Fund (UGF) would decline by 20 percent by next year and supported a spending limit. He supported a balanced approach and felt the state should not be reliant on the price of oil.

[3:32:24 PM](#)

SARAH SEARS, SELF, BETHEL (via teleconference), testified in support for CDVSA victim services in the DPS budget. She shared that she was a family nurse practitioner. In her work, she carried out the forensic exams on children who arrived at the Child Advocacy Center following sexual or physical abuse or after witnessing domestic violence. She requested full funding for victims' services. She explained that she was the leader of the medical sexual assault team and the child maltreatment team for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (YK Delta). She worked closely with many native organizations and state agencies. She detailed that after an incident advocates, law enforcement, and medical practitioners come together and provide support and resources for the survivor until the case was resolved. She reiterated that TWC provided shelter for women and children. She voiced that TWC had to constantly worry about insufficient funding and coupled with inflation they had to provide less programmatic support.

[3:34:30 PM](#)

NATHAN ERFURTH, PRESIDENT, KENAI PENINSULA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, KENAI (via teleconference), advocated for increased education funding and support for mental health services. He relayed that he was a history teacher and had lost students to suicide. He shared his experience about the loss of a student that had been threatening suicide at school and subsequently died due to insufficient support. He emphasized that mental health issues were endemic and increasing and he considered it a crisis. Mental health was a top priority for educators because students often confide in teachers when more help was needed. He emphasized that the statistics in Alaska were terrifying. He believed that more young people would survive with more support and resources. He asked for an increase in education funding in the BSA and added that stable funding was critical for all students' futures. Cutting schools or leaving them to languish did not serve students, the workforce, or the state. He commented that running a healthy society took resources.

[3:36:45 PM](#)

JAELA MILFORD, SELF, BETHEL (via teleconference), spoke in favor of funding for CDVSA victims' services. She shared that she worked as the Executive Director for Winter House, a homeless shelter in Bethel. She referenced TWC in Bethel and relayed that Winter House and TWC had been service partners for many years. Currently, TWC provided free clothing and winter gear for Winter House. Similar donations and support enabled Winter House to operate as an emergency shelter. In addition, TWC implemented and continued to lead the housing coalition to end homelessness in Bethel. With the help of TWC, Winter House will build a 24 unit apartment complex and offer other homeless services throughout the region. Full funding will help TWC provide life changing resources.

[3:39:02 PM](#)

PATRICIA LEE, SELF, FAIRBANKS LIO (via teleconference), spoke in favor of support for people with disabilities, caregivers, and reducing the waiver list. She shared that her son had recently passed away. She had the "opportunity" to help her son and learn how to obtain care for a person with disabilities. She discussed the low salary provided to

caregivers. She indicated that the pay for personal caregivers was so low that an individual had a higher salary working at McDonalds. She emphasized that caregivers were very important to the lives of people with disabilities and their families. She had to become her son's personal caregiver and was allotted 18 hours per week at \$15 per hour even though she provided 24 hour care. She wondered who could live on such a low a salary. She asked the committee to consider giving a "reasonable" living wage of up to \$25 per hour.

[3:41:56 PM](#)

DANIELLE LOGAN, SELF, FAIRBANKS, supported increased education funding. She shared that she was an educator in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District (FNSBSD) and currently served as president of the Education Support Staff Association (ESSA). She relayed that over the past seven years the school district had changed due to "fiscal struggles." She observed more turnover in the support staff than in prior years and many support positions were proposed to be cut and were often the first to be cut with tight funding. The custodial staff was shorthanded and often schools were run without custodial services. She shared that undertrained staff were being asked to do jobs that were not in their area of expertise. She believed that students ultimately suffer from the situation. She believed that being an educator was becoming harder and the situation existed prior to the pandemic. She believed that every educator cared about students and wanted what was best for their students. She commented that support staff were essential to running a school and they were the lowest paid employees in the district. She listed the many ways support staff assisted running the school. She stated that there was rapid turnover and over 80 percent of support staff had a second job. She characterized support staff jobs as "hard." She asked for a significant increase to the BSA.

Representative Stapp thanked Ms. Logan for representing Fairbanks.

[3:45:24 PM](#)

NICOLE BOWERS, SELF, JUNEAU (via teleconference), supported funding for childcare grants. She related that she was a teacher at a daycare center for 5 years. She explained that

the funding went directly to support wages for teachers and staff. Currently, daycare centers were extremely understaffed, and they were struggling to keep quality staff primarily due to low wages. She shared that she previously switched her workplace because the prior childcare center closed due to lack of staff. She emphasized that someone made more money working at McDonalds than caring for children. She reminded the committee that without teachers the childcare system would crumble, which was already happening. Higher wages would help mitigate the problem.

[3:47:23 PM](#)

KATHLEEN DOUGLASS, SELF, KOTZEBUE (via teleconference), spoke in favor of funding for disability services. She shared that she was the mother of a son with multiple disabilities who could not do any of his daily living chores by himself. He was happy and currently living in an adult facility for individuals with disabilities. She detailed that the family had a longtime caregiver who eventually moved away, and they were unable to find a replacement. Subsequently, her husband, the son's father was killed in an automobile accident, and she was left as the sole provider and had to reduce her work to part-time, which was a hardship. He moved into a disability home when he was 16 and she was grateful for the home and great care they provide her son. She communicated that the facility was short-staffed and needed additional funding. She asked for an increase for home and community disability services.

[3:50:40 PM](#)

ALANA GREER, SELF, KACHEMAK SELO (via teleconference), called in support of education funding. She was a K-6 teacher and was the only certified staff in the district due to budget cuts over the past several years. She believed that the students were not thriving academically. She had heard students cry and testify from all districts about what made schools important for them; theatre, sports, pools, etc. She observed new teachers having to leave because they could not afford housing and because the retirement system was broken. She asked for an increase to the BSA.

[3:53:02 PM](#)

ANDY DEGRAW, CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER, FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR SCHOOL DISTRICT, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified in support of an increase in education funding. He spoke to the arguments regarding education spending and felt they lacked context. He indicated that FNSBSD was currently facing a \$17 million deficit and was out of cash reserves. The district was in the process of spending down the remaining \$4 million in COVID funds. The district was forced to eliminate 85 staff (over 6 percent of the workforce) in all areas of the district and had cut 230 positions representing a little over 13 percent of its workforce in the last 3 years. He believed that pointing to statistics and figures lacked context, but his prior figures did not need any to understand the situation. In addition, the district was increasing class sizes at the kindergarten level up to 27 students, which meant some classes would end up with 30 students. He stressed that 30 kids in a classroom was a lot. The high school classes would increase up to 35 students per class. He indicated that the district eliminated millions of dollars in contracts and leases. He called for action on increasing the BSA.

Representative Stapp thanked Mr. Degraw for calling in.

[3:56:55 PM](#)

ZACARY NELSON, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), was calling on behalf of a friend who had suffered from a car accident a number of years back. He indicated that the individual did receive a Medicaid waiver yet struggled to get caregivers. He stated the family spent \$15,000 to \$20,000 annually to support the individual. He did not believe people understood the level of need that existed when someone suffered a disability. He felt that that amount was unreachable for many middleclass families. He was grateful for the help that was given and indicated that it was hard to compete with McDonalds. He supported funding for a living wage for caregivers. He thanked the committee.

Representative Stapp thanked Mr. Nelson for calling in.

[3:59:44 PM](#)

DAVID BRIGHTON, SELF, KENAI (via teleconference), supported an increase to the BSA. He offered that he was a special education teacher and father of two students in the

district. He stressed that schools had been bleeding for years from small cuts. He stated that inflation made it impossible to maintain the same level of education. His classroom no longer had a whiteboard because it was too expensive and he was using shower wall material from Home Depot, which was inadequate. He emphasized the need for an increase. He had worked for the district for 15 years and saw many teachers leaving the state due to an inadequate retirement system. He characterized the situation as "dire." He underscored the need for a BSA increase.

[4:01:52 PM](#)

JUNE ROGERS, CITY COUNCIL MEMBER, CITY OF FAIRBANKS, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), urged the committee to fully recapitalize the community assistance fund for FY 2024. She believed that it was a very important "partnership." She vocalized support for funding the service cost for the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS). In addition, she supported maintaining the sexual assault response team funding in the DPS budget. She asked the committee to give attention to all of the issues. She thanked the committee.

Representative Stapp thanked Ms. Rogers for calling in.

[4:04:49 PM](#)

MARIE FRANICH, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke in support for disability services. She shared that her son was severely disabled, and she shared details about her son's disability. She supported increased funding for caregivers under the Medicaid waiver. She shared that her son's caregiver had to manage her hours with her SNAP benefits and heating assistance and could not make a living wage as a single mom. She stated that disabled people were community members too. Her son had a waiver and very few of the \$89,000 available was spent because they could not find care attendants that would help get him out into the community. She believed that people deserved to be paid adequately to take care of others. She asked committee members to consider the hardship of everyday life for disabled people. She supported an increase in Medicaid funding.

[4:08:21 PM](#)

SANDI RYAN, PRESIDENT, FAIRBANKS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for education. She shared that she was an educator for 36 years and was ending her classroom career with a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment. She observed younger colleagues having a worse experience with inadequate retirement and lower wages and observed them needing to relocate or leave the profession. She advocated for a meaningful increase in the BSA and felt that it was critical. The district no longer had anything left to cut. She wanted to retain the best and brightest teachers. She thanked the committee.

Representative Stapp thanked Ms. Ryan for her service and testimony.

HB 39 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 41 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

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

#ADJOURNMENT

[4:11:47 PM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 4:11 p.m.