

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
February 6, 2024
10:02 a.m.

10:02:42 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Foster called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

Representative Bryce Edgmon, Co-Chair

ALSO PRESENT

Representative Stanley Wright, Sponsor; Rachael Gunn, Staff, Representative Stanley Wright; Honour Miller-Austin, Staff, Representative Will Stapp; Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson, Sponsor; Besse Odom, Staff, Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Rachel Buddin-Young, Member, Alaska State Board for Licensed Professional Counselors, Eagle River; Bryce Ward, Mayor, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Fairbanks; Keith Klaehn, Chairman, Defense Mission Taskforce, Colorado Springs; Tammie Perreault, Regional Liaison, United States Department Of Defense, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington; Celeste Groden, President and CEO, Alaska Black Caucus, Anchorage; Edward Wesley, Self, Anchorage; Michael

Patterson, Self, Anchorage; Emily Kloc, Self, Anchorage;
Brenda Tyler, Self, Anchorage.

SUMMARY

HB 126 ASSOCIATE AND PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS

HB 126 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 155 ESTABLISH AK MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMISSION

HB 155 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 22 PROCLAIM JUNETEENTH DAY A HOLIDAY

SB 22 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the agenda for the meeting.

#hb126

HOUSE BILL NO. 126

"An Act relating to the Board of Professional Counselors; and relating to licensing of associate counselors."

[10:04:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STANLEY WRIGHT, SPONSOR, introduced HB 126 and appreciated the committee for hearing the bill. He explained that every year, the University of Alaska (UA) behavioral health programs graduated a high number of qualified and knowledgeable students ready to begin careers in the behavioral health field. The current system lacked the structure and clarity necessary for individuals to make a smooth transition from post-graduate student to fully licensed professional counselor. The obstacles not only delayed the entry of qualified professionals into the workforce, but also perpetuated a long-standing waitlist of Alaskans in dire need of mental health services. By introducing the role of Associate Counselor, the bill would create a clear and structured pathway for graduates to enter the field, receive the necessary supervision, and progress towards becoming fully licensed. The tiered

approach proposed in the bill would align the state with the national standards and would demonstrate that the state's professionals were well-trained as well as ethically bound and effective in the practice of counseling. He asked his staff to provide her comments.

[10:06:51 AM](#)

RACHAEL GUNN, STAFF, REPRESENTATIVE STANLEY WRIGHT, relayed that the legislation was crafted with a dual focus: to enrich the full licensure of post-graduate counseling interns who were already serving Alaskans, and to elevate the support system for interns during the training phase. There was currently limited guidance and support available to students who had finished their education in behavioral health but had not yet completed all necessary requirements to become fully licensed professional counselors.

Ms. Gunn relayed that HB 126 would introduce the Associate Counselor program which would be developed by the Board of Professional Counselors in addition to criteria for supervisor certification. By establishing clear and streamlined pathways from completion of the graduate program in the mental health field to full licensure, the bill would remove unnecessary barriers that often delayed the professional development of aspiring counselors. The bill would uphold the training and supervision requirements already in place and ensure that every professional entering the field was well-prepared and qualified. The bill would also address access to health care, which was one of the most pressing issues in the health care field. She added that HB 126 would bring the state in line with over 65 percent of states that had already adopted a tiered system for licensure. The alignment would standardize the approach to mental health care as well as enforce the state's commitment to adopting best practices that had been recognized and implemented across the country.

Representative Josephson asked whether the bill defined the term "Associate Counselor." He asked if it was under the board's purview to define the term.

Ms. Gunn deferred the question to an invited testifier representing the board.

[10:09:31 AM](#)

RACHEL BUDDIN-YOUNG, MEMBER, ALASKA STATE BOARD FOR LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS, EAGLE RIVER (via teleconference), asked for the question to be repeated.

Representative Josephson repeated his question.

Ms. Buddin-Young responded that there would be pre-requisites in order to apply to become an associate counselor. The definition would be in regulation if it was not in statute and would apply to individuals who were considered "pre-independent licensed."

Representative Josephson noted the bill called for the repealing of the supervisory certification statute. He asked what the reason was for the repeal.

Ms. Buddin-Young responded that currently, there was no requirement for continuing education or reapplication after an individual received a supervisory license. The board would prefer the license to be renewable instead of a "one-and-done" license in order to be in line with the rest of the nation. During the preliminary discussions around the legislation, a recommendation was made to the board that the requirement be moved to regulation rather than statute.

Co-Chair Foster suggested that Ms. Buddin-Young provide her invited testimony.

[10:11:54 AM](#)

Ms. Buddin-Young stated that the bill would provide necessary assistance and support for new mental health counselors. Currently, post-graduate counselors were in a "no man's land" because there was a lack of structure and support following graduation. All of the responsibilities fell on the supervisors of the new counselors. The bill would provide more support to the supervisor, including support from the board and a more streamlined process. As a result, individuals would receive faster mental health care because intern counselors would have more support during the process of becoming licensed. The bill would also increase quality of care because the board would provide more support and guidance to prospective counselors.

Representative Hannan asked Ms. Buddin-Young what the academic preparations were for intern counselors. She asked for more information on the timeline and training

requirements before an individual could become fully licensed.

Ms. Buddin-Young responded that the requirement for licensure would not change. The requirements for full licensure included obtaining a master's degree in a field related to counseling, passing a national certification exam, and completing 3,000 hours of work experience under a qualified supervisor. An individual could not apply for full licensure before all of the requirements were met. The associate license proposed by the bill would provide post-graduate intern counselors assistance and governance during the required 3,000 hours of work experience. There was presently no support for counselors in training. The bill would add to the current requirements and allow for more structure and guidance.

Representative Hannan asked how long it typically took for an individual to accumulate the required 3,000 hours.

Ms. Buddin-Young replied that the minimum amount of time was two years, which was a standard time frame to complete the hours. Students typically took between two and four years depending on availability.

Representative Hannan asked if the bill would allow the associate counselors to bill services through insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid, or if there would be a need for separate legislation.

Ms. Buddin-Young replied that insurance billing practices were different from company to company. There were some insurance companies that would allow associate counselors to bill insurance. Some companies required that the supervisor's license be included in the billing process. Each agency had its own rules and regulations, but there would be some insurance companies that would accept billing from counselors in training.

Representative Hannan asked for clarification that some insurance companies would not accept billing from associate counselors.

Ms. Buddin-Young responded in the affirmative. She reiterated that some insurance agencies would accept it and others would not.

[10:16:24 AM](#)

Representative Josephson asked if there was confidence that the statute repealing the certification would be largely replaced. For example, the statute required that a supervisor would have at least five years of counseling experience. He asked for clarification that there would be similar requirements and regulations in lieu of the statute.

Ms. Buddin-Young responded in the affirmative. She added that the board would likely change the requirement to five years post-license experience. Currently, the time period during which post-graduate counselors in training were acquiring the 3,000 hours of work experience was counted towards the five years of counseling experience. Nationally, the five years of experience were required to be post-licensure in order to qualify to become a supervisor. The requirements would be similar apart from the aforementioned change to a renewable license. She explained that the requirements would be fine-tuned but not changed in a significant way.

Representative Josephson noted that the bill repealed language that would allow supervision to occur via telephonic or electronic means if an individual was in a remote location. He asked why it would be prudent to repeal the language.

Ms. Buddin-Young replied that the board wanted to encourage individuals to engage supervisors through electronic means; however, the board wanted to prevent situations in which a supervisor and trainee would never meet face-to-face. The goal was to implement safeguards to ensure that individuals in remote locations were getting the best possible supervisory experience.

[10:19:29 AM](#)

Co-Chair Foster asked the sponsor if he had any closing comments.

Representative Wright shared that coming back from military service was difficult, and the bill was personal to him. The bill would help people receive necessary mental health care quickly.

Co-Chair Foster set an amendment deadline for Tuesday, February 13, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.

HB 126 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

[10:21:06 AM](#)

AT EASE

[10:23:25 AM](#)

RECONVENED

#hb155

HOUSE BILL NO. 155

"An Act establishing the Alaska Military Affairs Commission; and relating to the duties and powers of the Alaska Military Affairs Commission."

[10:23:35 AM](#)

Co-Chair Foster noted that there was a proposed committee substitute (CS) for the bill.

Co-Chair Johnson MOVED to ADOPT the committee substitute for HB 155, Work Draft 33-LS0701\D (Marx/Gunther, 2/5/24) (copy on file).

Co-Chair Foster OBJECTED for discussion.

Representative Stapp introduced himself as the sponsor of the legislation.

HONOUR MILLER-AUSTIN, STAFF, REPRESENTATIVE WILL STAPP, introduced herself.

Representative Stapp offered an overview of HB 155 and the changes proposed in the CS. The purpose of the previously established Alaska Civilian-Armed Services Team (ACAST) was to discuss longevity, the military's impact in the community in terms of financial investment, and demonstrate an understanding that relationships mattered. In the prior year, he attended a military event at Fort Wainwright and a sergeant with whom he was acquainted 16 years ago had become the division commander for all forces in Alaska. The purpose of HB 155 was to establish longevity through the creation of the Alaska Military Affairs Commission (AMAC)

that could be a sustainable and reliable entity in the state. The problem in the past was that although there had been multiple iterations of military-oriented commissions, none of the commissions were sustainable and the purpose of the past commissions had never been clear. He relayed that Eielson Air Force Base in Fairbanks had been preserved through the establishment and support of ACAST and he would like to see AMAC emulate its success. He asked his staff to review the sectional analysis.

[10:28:22 AM](#)

Ms. Miller-Austin added that the commission was intended to advise the governor, the communities, and the state's congressional delegation on military matters, economic development related to military issues, and other matters involving the armed services in the state. She reviewed the sectional analysis (copy on file):

Section 1

- Establishes the Alaska Military Affairs Commission in the Office of the Governor
- Defines the Commission membership to include nine voting members
- Sets (staggered) three-year member terms
- Details Commission meetings, quorum rules, and authorizes per diem and travel expenses
- Enumerates the duties of the Commission

Section 2

- Ensures that the administrative support for the Commission is held within the Office of the Governor
- Sunsets the Alaska Military Commission on June 30, 2030

Section 3

- Adds uncodified law regarding the initial terms of Alaska Military Affairs Commission members

[10:30:31 AM](#)

Representative Hannan relayed that she had the sectional analysis for the original version of the bill and not the CS. She asked if there was a sectional available for the CS.

Representative Stapp noted that the CS would delete language in Section 2 that he found to be redundant. He read the language from the original bill (copy on file) that would be deleted in the CS as follows:

...nominated by an organization municipal governments in the state and appointed by the governor, if, within 60 days after a seat under this paragraph becomes vacant, an organization that represents municipal governments in the state fails to nominate one or more persons to fill the seat, the governor may appoint any qualified person; an organization that represents municipal governments in the state shall nominate, and the governor shall appoint...

Representative Stapp explained that the language referenced the seats that were reserved for the three mayors of the states that had various military installations. He did not feel the language was necessary and thought that it complicated the issue.

Representative Hannan understood that the only change made by the CS was in Section 2 and it regarded the mayor's designee.

Representative Stapp replied that the CS also added in Section 2, "appointed by the governor; the governor shall appoint" as a conforming change.

[10:32:34 AM](#)

Ms. Miller-Austin reviewed the fiscal impact note ULVMn prepared by the Office of the Governor. The fiscal note assumed that there would be associated costs in personal services, travel, contractual services, and commodities. The lieutenant governor would be designated as the chair of the commission and would be responsible for scheduling and planning commission meetings, preparing meeting materials and minutes, making non-state member travel arrangements for any in-person meetings, and securing meeting locations. There would be a need for additional personnel and the travel expenses for the four assumed meetings per year would be covered by per diem.

Representative Josephson asked why the commission would be housed in the Office of the Governor and not within the Office of Veteran's Affairs.

Representative Stapp responded that the commission would be the responsibility of the lieutenant governor. He explained that it was necessary for the executive to lead the conversation to ensure that the commission was sustainable. The goal was to maximize the long-term investments from the federal Department of Defense (DOD) in military communities such as Fairbanks. He thought it would be more efficient in Alaska for either the governor or the lieutenant governor to manage the commission.

Representative Josephson noted that the Alaska Veteran's Advisory Council was currently operational and he asked what the difference would be between the council and the proposed commission.

Representative Stapp deferred to his staff.

Ms. Miller-Austin replied that the purpose of the advisory council was to serve veterans, dependents, and survivors and those transitioning from military service. The purpose of the proposed commission was to focus on economic development within the state and provide a more unified front.

[10:36:24 AM](#)

Representative Galvin appreciated the effort but wanted more context. She understood that the commission would be housed in Anchorage, but noted that there were many letters of support from Fairbanks (copies on file). The bill proposed the involvement of three mayors, but the state was vast and there were military installations everywhere. She asked for an explanation of why Anchorage was chosen as the location for the commission.

Representative Stapp replied that the largest military presence in the state was in Anchorage. He thought it made sense for the majority of staffing to be located in the area of the state with the most substantial military presence. He suggested that invited testifiers were available to offer more information on the reason why only three mayors would be involved. Sometimes a smaller number

of people in leadership and fewer people involved in making decisions made for a more efficient operation.

Representative Galvin asked if Representative Stapp had considered adding language that would distinguish between the terms "urban" and "rural" to ensure that there was representation for both in the bill.

Representative Stapp thought the differentiation would happen naturally throughout the process of developing and operating the commission. There were still military installations in the state that were in rural areas and the bases were impactful for the communities. He thought DOD had many plans for Alaska and Arctic strategy was changing. The military would be refocusing on "next-generation enemies" and Alaska's role was at the forefront of all conversations. He thought the commission would help facilitate the changes.

[10:41:02 AM](#)

Co-Chair Foster WITHDREW the OBJECTION [to adopting the CS]. There being NO further OBJECTION, Work Draft 33-LS0701\D was ADOPTED.

Representative Coulombe asked what the effective date of the bill was and whether the bill proposed a sunset on the commission.

Representative Stapp deferred to his staff.

Representative Coulombe stated that she was uncertain whether there was an intention to sunset the commission.

Ms. Miller-Austin responded that she did not believe there was an effective date for the bill, which meant that the bill would go into effect 90 days after it passed. The commission would sunset on June 30, 2030, and was detailed on page 4, line 7 and 8 of the bill.

[10:43:09 AM](#)

Representative Hannan understood that there were no explicit military designees on the commission. The bill proposed that the commission include public members with extensive military backgrounds in a variety of branches.

She asked why the military branches were not specifically named.

Representative Stapp responded that there were two seats reserved for individuals with extensive military backgrounds. He asked for clarification on what Representative Hannan wanted to know.

Representative Hannan thought that the commission's vision was to engage in planning for the future of the military; however, if members of the commission were retired, the members' experience was not ongoing. She asked if it was a deliberate exclusion because the public members would not be specifically representing a military branch.

[10:44:57 AM](#)

Representative Stapp responded that the individual occupying the attorney general (AG) seat and representing the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs on the commission as public members would need to have extensive military and veteran experience. He argued that sometimes, requiring less specific experience was more effective. He thought that the language stating that the two public seats were reserved for individuals with extensive military experience was specific enough to cover concerns, but he was open to additional conversations.

Co-Chair Johnson remarked that she was a former mayor of a community with many military members. She asked if it might be prudent to include on the commission a public member who lived in a community with a strong military presence but who was not a member of the military themselves. She wondered if Representative Stapp expected that the three mayors' perspective would provide a complete picture of what military members in a particular community needed.

Representative Stapp replied that he hoped that the two public members would have extensive military experience. There was significant technical terminology involved in the military and he wanted to ensure that members of the commission fully understood the concerns of military members. He was not opposed to making changes to the bill that would better satisfy all parties.

Co-Chair Foster relayed that the committee would hear invited testimony.

10:48:31 AM

BRYCE WARD, MAYOR, FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), relayed that about 30 percent of the economy of Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) was derived from military members. He argued that Alaska was one of the first military defense responders and the military's presence could be seen throughout the state. He thought it was important to recognize that the Arctic strategy had pivoted nationally. The state was seen as responsible for leading the charge of protecting the country as well as projecting the nation's power in the Arctic region. He argued that AMAC had the ability to organize the required efforts on a statewide level. The readiness of military personnel had a major impact on the ability to carry out the Arctic mission. The military was examining the various factors that impacted the effectiveness of military members while on the job, such as the availability of adequate housing, education, and resources. The commission could easily determine the most pressing challenges for military members and take steps to address the issues statewide. He added that veterans were dealing with the same issues that active military members dealt with, such as access to health care and education services.

Mayor Ward continued that AMAC had a direct line of communication with the federal delegation and met once a month. There were staff from the Alaska's congressional offices responsible for communicating with the commission about the work that was being done in Washington, D.C. He thought it was important for the congressional delegation to have insight into the work that happened in Fairbanks and Anchorage and how it impacted the entire state. There was also a need for a coordinated effort to look at areas in Alaska from a military perspective, which could be provided by the commission. He argued that relationships mattered and the commission would help coordinate the relationships across the state and with other states like Florida and Texas, which had strong military affairs commissions.

10:55:27 AM

Mayor Ward recalled that there was a question about whether the commission would designate a member to represent a specific military branch. He explained that there was a

separate meeting called the Civilian Military Advisory to confer with military installation commanders. He had learned from the meetings that the installation commanders were not permitted to lobby. The commanders could share concerns with elected officials, but were not able to directly advocate to the federal delegation or statewide legislators. He suggested that a member on the commission would be able to have relationships with installation commanders across the state and effectively carry the concerns to political leaders. He noted that the mayors had the same function. He did not have a problem with the commission being located in Anchorage if it facilitated communication across the state.

Representative Josephson understood that the bill housed the commission in the Office of the Governor. He asked Representative Stapp whether the governor wanted the commission to be housed within the office for the purpose of downsizing.

Representative Stapp replied that the lieutenant governor was located within the Office of the Governor. He had misunderstood Representative Josephson's earlier question. He thought that every Alaska governor had understood that the military had an important role in the state. He believed the commission was a better alternative to ACAST, which would sunset in June of 2024.

[10:59:13 AM](#)

KEITH KLAHN, CHAIRMAN, DEFENSE MISSION TASKFORCE, COLORADO SPRINGS (via teleconference), thought that Colorado and Alaska shared many similarities. He shared that he also served on the national Association of Defense Communities, which was a traveling delegation of 40 people who attended conferences in D.C. twice a year and worked with other states on matters of defense. He reported that in recent years, Alaska had become increasingly engaged and FNSB was named by the association as one of the great American defense communities. He applauded Alaska's efforts to come together on defense issues. He thought due to the size of the state and the fact that there were large distances between military bases, it would be unrealistic to expect a small community to support the bases without the full commitment and assistance from the state.

Mr. Klaehn noted that there had been federal pressure to increase support for military bases with critical infrastructure needs as well as needs related to the quality of life of members. He explained that quality of life issues included child care, affordable housing, education, health care, and risk reduction. In the last several years, the military's electronic spectrum had been at risk and there was an increased potentiality for outside interference. He expressed that the good news was that there had never been more federal resources available to leverage in military efforts. He encouraged the committee to continue to work towards establishing AMAC. He thought the bill would benefit soldiers and service members serving in Alaska, including members of his own family.

[11:04:33 AM](#)

TAMMIE PERREAULT, REGIONAL LIAISON, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD, WASHINGTON (via teleconference), remarked that the committee had already heard from two experts who had spoken about the value of the bill, but she wished to amplify a couple of additional elements of the bill. She shared that it was her first time testifying in support of the policy. Her office had monitored similar policies for several years to determine how state-wide organizations could help improve some of the quality of life issues experienced by military members. She emphasized that her office was keenly focused on the quality of life of military members. She had seen that states that had a coordinated voice were able to address more quality of life issues for military families than states that were not working as a united front.

Ms. Perreault indicated that the most successful state organizations were led by the executive branch, which was the strategy outlined in HB 155. The highly varied locations of military members across Alaska made it difficult to develop a perspective that applied to the entire state. She had attended the Alaska Defense Forum in Fairbanks for several years and thought that the voice of FNSB had amplified the voice of the state overall. Over the years, she had seen that military families had benefited from statewide organizations. She highlighted that military issues and veterans' issues were different and there needed to be separate commissions to address both populations. She concluded that her office supported the legislation and

thanked Representative Stapp for bringing the legislation forward.

11:07:15 AM

Representative Hannan asked Representative Stapp whether he anticipated that ACAST would be extended past its upcoming sunset in June of 2024.

Representative Stapp responded that he did not think there was currently any legislation circulating that would extend ACAST. He would prefer that ACAST be replaced with AMAC.

Representative Hannan assumed that Representative Stapp's office developed comparisons between the two organizations and she thought it seemed that the two had a similar makeup. She argued that the Joint Armed Services Committee (JASC) should also be compared to the two organizations. She noted that JASC was tasked with working with the state's congressional delegation and HB 155 did not task AMAC with a similar directive. She asked if Representative Stapp would be interested in seeing JASC repealed. She thought there were several ways to look at the issue and it seemed confusing, particularly when the purpose of the legislation seemed to be to develop a unified voice. She wondered if it would make sense to combine all three entities into a single commission.

Representative Stapp replied that AMAC would help JASC make better decisions. He understood that the purpose of JASC was to act as the legislative representation for the military. He was uncertain whether he would support the dissolution of JASC at the present moment, but he would be open to other conversations in the future if HB 155 were to be passed into law.

Representative Hannan asked if there was discussion on specific directives for the purpose of coordinating with the federal delegation in the construction of AMAC.

Representative Stapp responded that the coordination already existed organically. The mayors were already dealing with active duty military members and by association, DOD. He did not think the coordination needed to be codified in the bill because it seemed to happen naturally.

Co-Chair Foster invited Representative Stapp to make closing comments.

[11:11:51 AM](#)

Representative Stapp appreciated the committee's time. He thought there was an opportunity for the state to become a more unified front. He shared that a new U.S. Army division had been established and it was placed in Alaska, which had never been done before. The federal government was serious about Arctic strategy and Alaska had a significant role to play. He urged support for the bill.

Co-Chair Foster set an amendment deadline for Tuesday, February 14, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.

HB 155 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

[11:13:09 AM](#)

AT EASE

[11:15:08 AM](#)

RECONVENED

#sb22

SENATE BILL NO. 22

"An Act establishing Juneteenth Day as a legal holiday."

[11:15:54 AM](#)

SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON, SPONSOR, introduced SB 22 and offered a brief history of Juneteenth. She shared that although the United States proclaimed itself as the "land of the free," the statement was not true until 1865. Before 1865, many Americans were still living under slavery and not living as the U.S. Declaration of Independence had promised. In 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation that freed enslaved people in Texas and all rebellious parts of southern secessionist states of the Confederacy. However, it was only through the Thirteenth Amendment that emancipation ended slavery throughout America. Two years later, Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas to announce that enslaved people were free by executive decree, marking the end of over 200 years

of the enslavement of Black Americans. Enslaved people in Texas would not find out that they were freed for an additional three years. In 2001, former Alaska Senator Lesil McGuire introduced HB 100 which established the third Saturday of each June as Juneteenth Day to commemorate the abolishment of slavery throughout the U.S. in 1865. The bill was signed into law on April 10, 2001, and she thanked past bipartisan members of both the House and Senate for supporting the bill.

Senator Gray-Jackson continued that Juneteenth was often seen as a "Black American holiday," but it was a celebration for everyone. She shared that Anchorage held the largest Juneteenth festival in the state, which was an event that embraced everyone in attendance regardless of color or ethnicity. The event included local, state, and federal politicians in addition to community members. There were also other countries that celebrated Juneteenth and the celebration extended well beyond color and ethnicity.

Senator Gray-Jackson concluded that SB 22 would create an awareness and appreciation for American history and help to continue the sometimes difficult conversation about what it meant to truly be free. She encouraged the community to keep festivities alive and continue to secure freedom for generations to come. She added that Juneteenth was also the day she moved to Anchorage and in the coming June, she will have lived in Alaska for 41 years.

[11:19:39 AM](#)

BESSE ODOM, STAFF, SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON, introduced the PowerPoint presentation "Senate Bill 22 'An act establishing Juneteenth Day as a legal holiday'" dated February 6, 2024 (copy on file). She indicated that she would be giving a high level overview of the bill and of Juneteenth itself. She continued on slide 2 of the presentation. The celebration of Juneteenth had several names: Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, Emancipation Day, and Liberation Day. She reiterated that the holiday was first celebrated in Galveston, Texas when enslaved individuals were made aware three years after the Emancipation Proclamation that they had been freed.

Ms. Odom continued on slide 3 and relayed that recognition of the day was broad. Every state including Washington D.C. celebrated Juneteenth in some capacity. The first state to

honor the holiday was Texas, followed by Florida, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Delaware, and Idaho. In addition to the states celebrating the holiday, there were several corporations that celebrated the holiday. Juneteenth celebrations were also held in other countries around the world, including South Korea, Israel, France, Guam, Honduras, Japan, Taiwan, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Ms. Odom continued on slide 4 and relayed that in 2021, President Biden signed a bill making Juneteenth a federal holiday. The holiday was now one of 11 official federal holidays. Most recently, the Anchorage Assembly voted unanimously to make Juneteenth a municipal holiday.

Ms. Odom advanced to slide 5 and explained what it would mean for Juneteenth to become a state holiday. In other states, people employed by the state might have a day off work. Stores and other organizations and businesses were likely to be open as usual, but some stores might close or have restricted hours. Many public transit services operated on their usual schedule, but there could be some changes. She concluded the presentation.

[11:23:09 AM](#)

Co-Chair Foster OPENED public testimony.

[11:24:06 AM](#)

CELESTE GRODEN, PRESIDENT AND CEO, ALASKA BLACK CAUCUS, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), relayed that the Alaska Black Caucus was a non-profit organization formed in the 1970s to champion the lives of Black people and other marginalized groups. She urged support for SB 22 and thought it was time that Alaska joined other states and recognized Juneteenth as a paid state holiday. Racism was widespread and deeply rooted and would not be eradicated in a single generation; however, declaring Juneteenth as a holiday would be a symbol to honor Black Americans who had suffered the impacts of slavery and racism. She noted that Juneteenth marked a date of major significance in American history and represented the way in which freedom for Black people had been delayed. She stressed that the purpose of Juneteenth becoming a state holiday was not to give employees a day off, but to give individuals a day to think about the desired future while remembering the inequities of the past. She urged passage of the bill. She thanked

Representative Galvin for hearing the bill and Senator Gray-Jackson for sponsoring the bill.

Representative Galvin clarified that she was a strong supporter of the bill but she was not a sponsor. She stressed that the bill was the result of extensive work done by Senator Gray-Jackson and her staff.

[11:27:49 AM](#)

EDWARD WESLEY, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), had been a resident of Alaska for 50 years. He was excited about the direction the state was going in the recognition of Juneteenth. He thought that making Juneteenth a holiday would acknowledge history as well as contribute to a healing process. Over 200,000 African Americans fought in the Civil War and out of that effort, the Buffalo Soldiers group was established. The Buffalo Soldiers provided security for the expansion of the West and were the primary force behind winning the Spanish American War in 1898. The soldiers were sent to Alaska in 1889 and remained in the state until 1903. He explained that he was speaking about the soldiers because he wanted to stress that the contributions of African Americans throughout the history of the state and the nation were vast. Despite the contributions, African Americans had suffered from 200 years of free labor and from being denied the opportunity to build generational wealth.

Mr. Wesley continued that the hearing process of SB 22 had acknowledged a number of injustices committed against African Americans. For example, in the late 1940s, two African Americans were hung in Juneau and the injustice had never been resolved. When the Voters Rights Act was enacted, Alaska was one of 13 states that had to receive clearance from the U.S. Department of Justice before it could make major changes to voting processes. He stressed that the bill would send a message that Alaska was no longer living in the past and that the state wanted to acknowledge the atrocities that had been committed against African Americans. He asked for support for the legislation.

[11:32:27 AM](#)

MICHAEL PATTERSON, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. He shared that Juneteenth

was his favorite holiday and a way to celebrate his ancestors' struggles for liberation. His last name was a "slave name" and did not originate from his ancestors. He believed that proclaiming the day as a holiday would act as a reminder of the progress the country had made as well as the progress yet to come. Proclaiming Juneteenth a holiday was one of the steps towards reconciliation in the aftermath of slavery. He thought there were two revolutions for independence in the country: the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. He argued that Juneteenth would recognize independence in the same way the Fourth of July recognized independence.

[11:35:01 AM](#)

EMILY KLOC, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. She thought it was important for Juneteenth to be recognized as a holiday. She thanked Senator Gray-Jackson and Ms. Odom for their hard work on the legislation.

[11:35:58 AM](#)

BRENDA TYLER, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. The state must recognize and reflect on the history and the cost of freedom. Recognizing Juneteenth as a holiday would encourage Alaskans to never forget the events and horrors of slavery as well as the systemic setbacks still faced by African Americans in the present day. She shared that she was an African American and had lived in Alaska since 1981. She thanked Senator Gray-Jackson for her work on the bill.

[11:36:55 AM](#)

Co-Chair Foster CLOSED public testimony.

Representative Hannan noted that Senator Gray-Jackson had mentioned legislation that had passed in 2001 [the aforementioned HB 100]. She asked for confirmation that the 2001 legislation would be repealed in SB 22 and how the legislation from 2001 intersected with SB 22.

Senator Gray-Jackson replied that the 2001 legislation simply recognized Juneteenth as a holiday.

Representative Hannan asked what the "repealer" in Section 3 of SB 22 would accomplish.

Senator Gray-Jackson responded that she could not answer the question but would follow up with Representative Hannan.

Representative Ortiz shared his appreciation for the bill and hoped it would be moved expeditiously.

Representative Stapp asked how many other states had adopted Juneteenth as a paid holiday.

Senator Gray-Jackson deferred the question to her staff.

Ms. Odom responded that 27 states had adopted Juneteenth as a paid holiday.

[11:40:22 AM](#)

Representative Josephson was grateful for the senator's efforts on the bill and remarked that it was the easiest "yes" vote he would cast in his life. He asked if employees would get the proceeding Friday off if Juneteenth fell on a Saturday.

Senator Gray-Jackson replied in the affirmative.

Co-Chair Foster noted that the committee had not planned to discuss the fiscal note, but indicated that Senator Gray-Jackson was welcome to discuss the fiscal note if she was ready.

Senator Gray-Jackson replied that she was ready to address the fiscal note. She was ready to move the bill forward as quickly as possible. The bill came close to passing in 2023 and she hoped it could pass in the current year.

Co-Chair Foster noted that the bill had been scheduled in the House Finance Committee in 2023 but extended budget debates prevented the committee from holding a meeting.

Co-Chair Johnson asked about slide 3 of the presentation. She noted that some states indicated that there would be an observance of Juneteenth and others referred to Juneteenth as a holiday. She asked if there were different ways in

which other states recognized the holiday. She wondered how Juneteenth was "added to the calendar" in various states.

[11:43:18 AM](#)

Senator Gray-Jackson was not certain what Co-Chair Johnson meant by adding the holiday to a calendar.

Co-Chair Johnson replied that she was wondering if there were different ways in which the holiday was added to state workers' calendars. She understood that the holiday would be added to the Alaska calendar as a paid day off. She read through the various ways other states referred to the holiday on slide 3. She asked if the senator could explain the different strategies because there had been discussion in other committees on the variety of ways to observe the holiday.

Senator Gray-Jackson replied that Juneteenth was a paid holiday just like Christmas or the Fourth of July. She explained that it would be observed in the same manner as every other paid holiday that the state offered to its employees.

Ms. Odom added that the purpose of the bill was to allow for Juneteenth to become a paid state holiday. She explained that the holiday would be handled similarly in Alaska as it was in New Mexico, which was detailed on slide 3 of the presentation. If Juneteenth became a state holiday, most workers would get the day off and most banks and state offices would be closed as well. She hoped that Co-Chair Johnson's question had been answered.

Co-Chair Johnson responded that the response was sufficient and suggested that she could discuss with the sponsor the meaning of "observance" outside of the committee meeting. Her biggest concern about the bill was with the fiscal note and not with the terminology.

Senator Gray-Jackson commented that "you cannot put a price on celebrating freedom." She noted that she had met with Representative Stapp many times outside of the committee meeting and had made the same comment to him.

Representative Galvin understood that the federal government treated Juneteenth as a paid holiday already and the bill would allow Alaska to adhere to the observance of

the holiday. She asked if she was correct in her understanding that it was already a day off for federal employees, but the bill would expand the paid day off to all employees.

Senator Gray-Jackson replied that Juneteenth was already a federal holiday. The Municipality of Anchorage made it a paid holiday in 2023. She reiterated that if the bill were to pass, Juneteenth would become a paid state holiday.

Representative Galvin commented that she completely supported the bill.

[11:48:20 AM](#)

Co-Chair Foster noted that there were eight fiscal notes (copies on file) but a summary sheet of all of the fiscal notes had been distributed to committee members (copy on file) to streamline the process. He invited the senator to summarize the fiscal notes.

Senator Gray-Jackson asked if she should go over each fiscal note. She would be happy to do so if it was the will of the committee.

Co-Chair Foster suggested that the senator highlight any elements of the fiscal notes she found particularly important.

Senator Gray-Jackson responded that she could offer the total fiscal cost of the bill as a starting point for the discussion. The fiscal impact of all eight fiscal notes combined would be \$957,000.

Representative Coulombe understood that eight departments would be impacted by the bill. She asked for clarification that the \$957,000 was the cost of overtime pay that would be incurred for departments that would need employees to work on the holiday.

Senator Gray-Jackson responded that Representative Coulombe was correct in her understanding.

Representative Coulombe commented that she did not see any mention of the fiscal impact of managing the holiday. She asked if the fiscal notes were only covering the overtime pay.

Senator Gray-Jackson responded in the affirmative.

[11:51:46 AM](#)

Co-Chair Johnson asked for clarification that \$957,000 reflected the total cost of the paid day off. She had previously understood that the cost was different than \$957,000.

Senator Gray-Jackson asked to what number Co-Chair Johnson was referring. The previous fiscal note was \$1.2 million.

Representative Stapp agreed that one could not put a price on freedom.

Senator Gray-Jackson appreciated the comment.

Co-Chair Foster asked if the senator had any closing comments.

Senator Gray-Jackson responded that she did have closing comments, but first she would like her staff to respond to Representative Hannan's earlier question about the repealer.

Ms. Odom relayed that the bill repealed AS 44.12.090, which was the existing statute around Juneteenth which said that the governor would issue a proclamation. She explained that if SB 22 became law, there would be no need for a proclamation because similar language would already be in statute.

Representative Hannan shared that Juneteenth was one of 50 days that were acknowledged in state statute, but not considered a holiday. She thought it was time that Juneteenth was elevated to a state holiday.

[11:54:11 AM](#)

Co-Chair Foster set an amendment deadline for Tuesday, February 13, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.

SB 22 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the agenda for the afternoon meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

[11:54:46 AM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 11:54 a.m.