

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
February 7, 2024  
1:35 p.m.

1:35:11 PM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Johnson called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 1:35 p.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

Kim Kovol, Commissioner, Department of Family and Community Services; Marian Sweet, Assistant Commissioner, Department of Family and Community Services; Clinton Lasley, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Family and Community Services.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Shannon Dilley, Director, Division of Juvenile Justice, Anchorage; Kim Guay, Director, Office of Children Services, Anchorage.

SUMMARY

HB 268      APPROP: OPERATING BUDGET; CAP; SUPP; AM

HB 268 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 270      APPROP: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET

HB 270 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

OVERVIEW: DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

#hb268

#hb270

HOUSE BILL NO. 268

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and loan program expenses of state government and for certain programs; capitalizing funds; amending appropriations; making capital appropriations; making supplemental appropriations; making reappropriations; 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. 270

"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."

^OVERVIEW: DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Co-Chair Johnson reviewed the meeting agenda. She turned the gavel over to Co-Chair Foster.

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AT EASE

1:38:03 PM

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Foster chaired the meeting.

1:38:19 PM

KIM KOVOL, COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES, introduced the PowerPoint presentation "Department of Family and Community Services FY2025 Budget Overview" dated February 7, 2024 (copy on file). She began

on slide 2 titled "Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS):"

Mission:

To provide support, safety, and personal well-being for vulnerable Alaskans.

Staff: 1,866 full-time permanent

Divisions:

Alaska Pioneer Homes

Alaska Psychiatric Institute

Office of Children's Services

Division of Juvenile Justice

Departmental Support Services

Total Budget: \$478,452.4 (\$ in thousands)

Commissioner Kovol turned to the organizational chart on slide 3 and briefly described the department's organization that contained 4 divisions: Alaska Pioneer Homes, Alaska Psychiatric Institute, Office of Children's Services, and Juvenile Justice.

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MARIAN SWEET, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES, continued on slide 4 titled "DFCS Operating Budget Comparison FY 2023 - FY 2025." She explained that the difference between the FY 24 management plan and FY 25 request was a 3.9 percent increase, of which the majority was technical salary increases. She pointed to the FY 23 actuals that was significantly reduced due to high vacancies and recruitment difficulties. She anticipated via a new talent acquisition process, to expedite recruitment and increase new hires. In addition, in FY 23 the Office of Children's Services (OCS) received funding from the People's First Initiative, where not all the funding could be expended due to staff shortages and low recruitment. However, the first division utilizing the new hiring process was OCS and it already had increased new hires.

Co-Chair Foster asked for confirmation that the 3.9 percent increase in FY 25 was a comparison between the FY 24 management plan and FY 25 budget request. Ms. Sweet responded in the affirmative. Co-Chair Foster asked if that was in Undesignated General Funds (UGF) or an overall increase. Ms. Sweet answered that it was an overall increase. Co-Chair Foster asked what the UGF only increase was. Ms. Sweet would follow-up with the answer.

Representative Coulombe asked for clarification on the Other Funds on the slide represented by the gray on the bar graph. Ms. Sweet responded that other funding was comprised of interagency receipts and statutory designated program receipts.

Co-Chair Foster noted Representative Stapp had joined the meeting.

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Ms. Sweet continued on slide 5 titled "Department of Family and Community Services - Departmental Support Services:"

Mission:

Provide quality administrative services in support of the department's mission.

Staff: 82 full-time positions

Program Improvements:

Talent Acquisition Team

Technical Innovations

Representative Galvin cited the Other Funds category on slide 4 and asked for more information. Ms. Sweet reiterated that it was comprised of interagency receipts and statutory designated program receipts.

Ms. Sweet continued on slide 6 titled "Departmental Support Services (DSS) Operating Budget Comparison FY2023-FY2025:"

DSS Significant Budget Items:

Reorganize Designated Evaluation & Treatment and Complex Care into new Coordinated Health & Complex Care Component

FY 2025 Increment \$750.0 (GF) to support Complex Placement Program

Ms. Sweet noted that the reorganization and realignment combined the Designated Evaluation and Treatment component and Complex Care Unit. The second increment created a single point of contact within state government for the complex needs due to an insufficient number of providers. The department worked with the community providers and offered support, training, and funding so the community could provide step down services for youth.

Co-Chair Foster asked for more information regarding how the \$750 thousand would be expended. Ms. Sweet answered that it would mostly be expended for services offered by the provider.

Representative Stapp referenced Disproportionate Share or DSH payments. He asked for an explanation of what they are and impacts if the payments changed. Ms. Sweet responded that it was funding received through the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) in support of hospital that receive a disproportionate amount of patients without insurance or Medicaid. The Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) received the Institution for Mental Disease (IMD) portion of the funding. She cautioned that the DSH funding might be reduced by the federal government. The department sent an inquiry to CMS asking for clarity regarding how it would affect Alaska's program; 50 percent of the program was funded through Medicaid.

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Ms. Sweet addressed slide 7 titled "Talent Acquisition Team:"

Dedicated human resources team to improve recruitment and retention

Expedited recruitment and hiring

Personal engagement with candidates throughout process

Specialized on-boarding support and orientation training

Phased implementation - started with Office of Children's Services

Ms. Sweet reiterated that recruitment had been a challenge across all state agencies. The department discovered that the administrative efforts for the hiring process were too extreme; people lost interest because the process took too long. The number of individuals declining positions was 53 percent due to the lack of communication from an employer to a potential employee. She added that the increased communication and support of the candidates demonstrated that the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS) valued them as prospective employees. All divisions would be onboarded in the new program by 2026.

Representative Tomaszewski asked how many people were on the talent acquisition team. Ms. Sweet replied that it was a team of 4.

Representative Galvin asked if there was research done regarding wages and whether it was a factor in recruiting and retaining, especially in OCS. Ms. Sweet responded that the goal was to recruit and retain staff. She shared that the state awarded a contract from an RFP on a salary study on state positions. Representative Galvin clarified that there was not a specific study regarding OCS.

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Ms. Sweet continued on slide 8 titled "Talent Acquisition Team - Days from Referral to Approval to Hire." She shared some of the successes of the talent acquisition team. The time from referral of the candidate to offering the position was reduced to 10 days.

Ms. Sweet moved to slide 9 titled "Technical Innovations:"

- Data Lake
- Mobile Device Management Standardization
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- ImageSource ILINX
- Electronic Health Record
- Tiger Connect
- WiFi in Facilities

Ms. Sweet indicated that the department was committed to using data to drive decisions and utilizing technology was the means to its goal. The data would be used by the Complex Care Team and increase collaboration between divisions and community stake holders to help analyze the need for services within the state. In addition, OCS had implemented the electronic adoption management program via ImageSource that was digitizing all adoption records that paired with the Mobile Device Management allowing staff to access many of the new data applications for all digitized data. She elaborated that the department was partnering with Net Smart to create Electronic Health Records for API and the Pioneer Homes (PH). The department implemented state secure WiFi in both facilities for patients, residents, and their families.

Ms. Sweet continued that the department was focusing on standardizing IT to build efficiencies and for use in facility operations. She indicated that DFCS implemented Tiger Connect in September 2023 that was a HIPA compliant mobile device and desktop platform used to communicate both internally and with external partners.

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CLINTON LASLEY, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES, continued the presentation on slide 10 titled "Alaska Pioneer Homes:"

Providing elder Alaskans a home and community, celebrating life through its final breath.

Locations: Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan, Palmer, Sitka

Staff: 425 Full Time Positions

Capacity: 560 residents

Program Improvement:

Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Services

Online Waitlist and Enrollment

Mr. Lasley reported that up to 50 percent of residents had a dementia diagnosis with up to approximately 75 to 85 percent of residents showing signs of the disease. The division took a positive approach to care by ensuring staff understood the needs of those living with Alzheimer's and

how to best serve the resident. Approximately 36 staff had training in the positive approach and would train all staff across the division. He noted the Dementia Specialty Apprenticeship Program in conjunction with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DLWD), that trained 84 Certified Nursing Assistants over the prior 7 years. The program was voluntary and with completion of the program the DNA's received a one-step pay increase, which increased retention.

Co-Chair Foster announced that Representative Hannan joined the meeting.

Mr. Lasley added that the department was working on interacting with elders and families by offering electronic applications to streamline the process.

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Representative Cronk asked what number of people needed care in the state. Mr. Lasley responded that currently 6 thousand individuals were on the wait list. He furthered that the system worked in two ways: a 60 year old person could submit a placeholder application and when ready to move in, the person "activated" the application and if an offer was made had 30 days to move in. There were over 286 individuals on the activated wait list, with the need continuing to grow. Representative Cronk wondered what the total number of Alaskans in need of elder residential care was. He voiced that it was a big issue for the state.

Commissioner Kovol answered that other residential institutions in the state were able to screen out residents that needed a higher level of care, which increased PH residents with a higher intense need of care. She pointed out that the PHs accepted all Alaskans regardless of their level of care.

Representative Cronk asked if the department was working with private elder care residential entities to help build more care residences. Ms. Sweet replied that DCFC worked with all partners but warned that they were private agencies. She asserted that the PHs were in competition with them for staff. The department had heard stories from PH elders about forming strong bonds and relationships with staff and the department wanted to share their stories with the public.

2:09:45 PM

Ms. Sweet continued on slide 11 titled "Alaska Pioneer Homes (AKPH) Operating Budget Comparison FY2023-FY2025:"

AKPH Significant Budget Items:

Pharmacy Collections - FY 2024 SDPR (Statutory Designated Program Receipts) Supplemental  
\$1,000.0 (Other)

Pharmacy Collections - FY 2025 SDPR Increment  
- \$500.0 (Other)

Ms. Sweet explained that SDPR was collected through the pharmacy program in the PHs. Higher collections were necessary due to higher utilization and increased pharmaceutical costs. The second item was related to Inter Agency (IA) receipts and SDPR via Medicaid claims and an RSA with the Division of Juvenile Justice who provided juvenile pharmacy needs through the PH. She noted that the majority of the UGF was for the Payment Assistance Program and a small balance was used to provide operations. The DGF represented collections from residents' insurance and private pay and some federal reimbursement for the veterans in the Palmer Pioneer Home. She noted that the only other budget items were for salary adjustments.

Representative Cronk asked what the average monthly cost was for residents of PHs. Mr. Lasley responded that the costs vary widely among 5 levels of care. He elucidated that the lowest level of care was level one costing \$3 thousand per month. The highest level of care cost \$15 thousand per month.

Mr. Lasley continued on slide 12 titled "Alaska Psychiatric Institute;"

Providing compassionate health care to support Alaskans in living their best possible lives.  
Capacity and Staff:

5 inpatient units, 80 licensed beds

10 jail-based spots, 10 community spots

325 Full Time Positions

Program Improvement:

Community and Jail Based Restoration Programs (FY 2024 \$800.)

Beacon Award- Alaska Hospital and Healthcare Association

Mr. Lasley cited the prior challenges at API that was at the risk of closure with only 20 patients. He reported on the improvements made and noted that 73 was the current average number of patients. He elaborated that the purpose of the Jail Based Restoration Programs assisted individuals with a mental health disease that had been accused of a felony prepare for their defense by moving them from prison to API for restoration services. The Community and Jail Based Restoration Programs improvement doubled the jail capacity and created a ten seat outpatient restoration program for those with a misdemeanor conviction.

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Representative Josephson cited a prior study commissioned by DHSS researched by Agnew Beck that showed the amount needed to build out the jail based facility was \$2 million for new construction. He wondered how the improvements were being accomplished for \$800 thousand. Mr. Lasley responded that it required significant work and collaborations with the Department of Corrections (DOC). He shared that a consultant was hired, and a mod was identified in the correctional facility; it was accomplished for \$800 thousand without additional capital expenditures. Representative Josephson reported that he had a bill [HB 80 (Incompetency; Civil Commitment)] that would necessitate more screening, which would result in more commitment issues filed. He asked how the expanded program's resources would hold up under the bill's scenario. Mr. Lasley responded that he would need to wait to see if the bill was adopted to determine an answer. However, for both programs they were contemplating on how to expand the services. He was confident that the departments could find ways to expand services.

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Representative Coulombe asked about the vacancy rates and recruitment at API. Mr. Lasley answered that the department

was doing well as far as vacancies except for nursing positions and psychiatrists and psychologists. The psychiatrists' positions were currently filled. He mentioned that the department utilized the SHARP Program that offered education repayments for API staff. He hoped to expand the program. Representative Coulombe indicated that she was able to visit API and was impressed with the progress made. She asked if the number of beds were limited by personnel or physical structure. Mr. Lasley responded that it was due to physical structure.

Commissioner Kovol interjected that the department was engaged in student practicum placements from medical fields with 35 participants; the bulk located at API. She hoped to hire all 35 participants.

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Mr. Lasley cited the Beacon Award and elaborated that API created the Denali Unit for patients with comorbidities that resulted in a 62 percent reduction in patient on staff assaults.

Ms. Sweet turned to slide 13 titled "Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) Operating Budget Comparison FY 2023-FY 2025:"

API Significant Budget Items:

Establish Alaska Psychiatric Institute as a Division  
FY2025 UGF Increment

\$200.0 (GFMH) to support SHARP program

Ms. Sweet discussed the two significant budget changes in the API budget for FY 25. The department was seeking approval to move API back into its own division once again. Ms. Sweet referred to the SHARP program and reported that the request was to fill in the remaining psychiatrist and psychologist positions. She indicated that the other category was comprised of technical salary adjustments, IA, and SDPR that was collected from insurance collection and private pay.

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Mr. Lasley continued on slide 14 titled "Division of Juvenile Justice:"

Mission:

- Hold juvenile offenders accountable for their behavior.
- Promote the safety and restoration of victims and communities.
- Assist offenders and their families in developing skills to prevent crime.

Shannon Dilley, Director

Facilities / Offices / Staff:

- 6 Facilities / 13 Probation Offices / 424 Full Time Positions

Program Improvement:

- Traumatic Brain Injury Project
- Community Engagement

Mr. Lasley voiced that the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) operated via a restorative justice model. He elaborated that evidence showed 40 percent of juveniles in the system had brain injuries. In collaboration with Southeast Regional Resource Center and the Division of Public Health (DPH) the project screened and identified youths with Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) entering the juvenile justice system that ensured they received the needed referrals for treatment. The program launched in Fairbanks and would expand in the next year. He furthered that the division was always looking for new ways for community engagement for its youth utilizing other services in state government. One successful program allowed youth to participate in activities in the PH. He listed the program's benefits and the types of activities the youth engaged in.

Co-Chair Foster asked which DJJ facilities recently closed. Mr. Lasley answered that the Nome and Ketchikan facilities were closed. Co-Chair Foster pointed out that the facilities were being utilized at the time of closure but were used less than other facilities. The communities they

served felt the loss in their communities. He wanted to explore the possibility of opening them again.

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Representative Stapp reported that he had toured a DJJ facility. He referred to the TBI program and asked if there was correlative data on the types of events that caused the injury. He expressed alarm at the number of youths with TBIs.

Mr. Lasley deferred the answer to a colleague.

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SHANNON DILLEY, DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF JUVENILE JUSTICE, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), replied that the state's data tracked national data and she shared his concern over the high number. She did not have the data regarding how the injuries occurred.

Representative Hannan asked what the average population was in DJJ facilities. Mr. Lasley responded that there were currently 141 youth in the facilities with a staffing and bed capacity of 172. Representative Hannan asked whether part of the screening identified Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and other significant mental illnesses and the number of juveniles with the conditions. Mr. Lasley deferred to Ms. Dilley to respond.

Ms. Dilley responded that JDD provided a number of clinical assessments that were diagnosed by the mental health team. In addition, the division conducted a comprehensive trauma screening tool to assess child trauma.

Representative Hannan believed that the juveniles should be as close to home as possible to enable repairing and restoring family and community relationship. She felt that creating efficiencies by closing facilities and "warehousing our youth far away from home" did not work for juvenile justice.

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Co-Chair Foster supported Representative Hannan's statement and added that the Nome facility also served youth from

other parts of Western Alaska. He believed the youth needed family nearby.

Representative Coulombe had discussions with CDVSA and the Alaska Mental Health Trust (AMHTA) and surmised that the high rates of brain traumas resulted from high rates of domestic violence. She was wondering why the division's UGF was so high and lacked a significant amount of federal money. Ms. Sweet answered that the department had expanded its efforts in seeking federal grants and recently received one for girls in the juvenile justice system. However, the grants were from the federal Department of Justice and the grant pool was small. Representative Coulombe asked if historically the grants were not awarded to the state or if there was a lack of grant funding to apply for. Ms. Sweet replied that she was unaware of the division's grant award history and offered to provide the information.

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Mr. Lasley added that the majority of services at the division were not federally eligible, and the majority of services were largely the state's responsibility. Representative Coulombe asked whether the AMHTA supported the TBI program. Ms. Sweet answered in the affirmative, and added it was through a \$100 thousand behavioral health grant to help with behavioral health within the facilities.

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Ms. Sweet continued on slide 15 titled "Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Operating Budget Comparison FY 2023-FY 2025.) She indicated that there were no significant budget changes, and the increase was specific to salary adjustments. The majority of funding was UGF, and the other category was strictly interagency receipts.

Co-Chair Foster pointed to the FY authorized budget of \$58 million UGF depicted on the graph, but the actuals came in roughly \$1 million less. He wondered why. Ms. Sweet noted there had been significant position shortages across all departments with the division suffering a more severe loss in the prior year.

Mr. Lasley continued on slide 16 titled "Office of Childrens Services:"

Mission:

Ensuring the safety, permanency and well-being of children by strengthening families, engaging communities, and partnering with Tribes.

Offices and Staff:

- 5 regions with 21 offices statewide
- 610 Full Time Positions

Program Improvement:

- Tribal Compact Expansion
- Placement Search and Support Unit

Mr. Lasley elaborated that the numbers of children had reduced to 2.6 thousand down from 3 thousand. He referred to the Tribal Child Welfare Compact and explained that the compact expansion transitioned OCS services to its tribal partners and was able to expand the number of tribes that had entered the contract; currently representing 170 tribes across the state. He furthered that over the last couple years the tribal compact funding increased to \$5 million with the majority of funding expended for prevention. The tribes were engaged in prevention efforts. He acknowledged that the tribes could best serve their children in their communities.

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Representative Galvin shared that a dollar spent in the early part of a child's life was equated to \$8 to \$12 in return. She asked what the tribal organizations were doing and whether the ideas were generated from them. She also inquired what non-tribal prevention efforts OCS was engaged in. Mr. Lasley responded that the compact relationship was one of government to government. The negotiation for the terms of prevention efforts did not have any parameters so the tribes could do what worked best for their members. He deferred further answer to a colleague.

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KIM GUAY, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF CHILDREN SERVICES, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), replied that the office had been working on broadening prevention. She elaborated that the tribal program focused on primary prevention and secondary prevention; community wellness and individual wellness aimed at how to prevent foster care. She reiterated that

the tribes had many different ideas on how best to serve their population. She furthered discussed other preventative efforts that included family resource centers, respite care, Parents as Teachers, among other things. She offered to provide a complete list.

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Representative Josephson recalled that OCS had experienced very high turnover for social workers. There was an effort in subcommittee to pay retention bonuses. He asked if it had actually happened.

Mr. Lasley answered that retention bonuses for OCS was through the governor's People First Initiative. He added that the bonuses were paid. Representative Josephson inquired if the bonuses were successful. Mr. Lasley deferred the answer to the director.

Ms. Guay responded that there was some reduction in turnover and some positive stabilization trends in retention of front line workers. However, she related that it was not sufficient, retention improved from a high of 56 percent during the pandemic to 46 percent currently. Representative Josephson recounted that a new clinician position was created. He asked whether the position still existed and if it had been helpful. Ms. Guay answered that it had been filled and was very successful. She furthered that the position was the Wellness and Resiliency Officer who engaged in critical incident debriefings with staff working with children, office wellness assessments, and focused on how the division could keep the staff healthy. She added that the division, in collaboration with the Department of Health, implemented a "Reflective Supervision" model called "Facilitated Attunement," which was well received by the staff.

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Representative Coulombe asked for information about the \$1 million increment [on slide 17 titled "Office of Children's Services (OCS) Operating Budget Comparison FY 2023-FY 2025." Legal Services \$1 million GF] for legal services.

Commissioner Kovol replied that the funding was for the A Better Childhood (ABC) lawsuit [Jeremiah M. v. Crum]. The department filed a motion one year ago and the motion was

denied. The case was in the discovery phase and the calendar was accelerated. She anticipated the court date to happen in 2025.

Mr. Lasley continued that the final item on slide 16 was the Placement Search and Support Unit. He elucidated that it was a new unit designed to support resource families with all aspects of caring for the child. He added that the department only provided a snapshot of their improvements and services.

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Representative Tomaszewski asked about the PHs. He referenced the private senior home Timber Creek and asked whether the state was encouraging or hindering private sector care and what the interaction was between the state and the private sector. Commissioner Kovol clarified that the competition she previously referred to was for workforce. She clarified that she was not in a business competition. The division focused on best practices and who was working with the elders. She apologized for any confusion. All care homes were all striving to hire the same type of care professionals. Representative Tomaszewski asked if there were other private industries stepping forward to provide the care and if the state interacted with Timber Creek. Commissioner Kovol deferred the question to the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development.

Representative Tomaszewski cited the Legislative Audit Report from November 21, 2023 [A Special Review of the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS), Office of Children's Services Compliance with Foster Care Reform Laws, Part 2, Audit Control Number 26-30096-24] and noted that there were six recommendations for OCS. He pointed to one that cited OCS for 3 at risk child placements due to OCS staff not following proper background check procedures. He asked if the background check process had been reinforced and if the staff received more training. Commissioner Kovol responded in the affirmative.

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Representative Cronk asked that if there were enough private sector senior homes would the state eventually shut PHs down. Mr. Lasley answered that even with the 8 or 9

large new facilities that had opened the PH waitlist numbers had recently increased because private homes were selective in the type of care it provided. The Pioneer Home system provided elder Alaskans security regardless of ability to pay. He shared that when there were new facilities interested in opening, the division helped support and encourage the facilities via training or information. Representative Cronk appreciated the PH services and system.

[3:10:12 PM](#)

Ms. Sweet discussed slide 17 and addressed significant budget item that increased the Foster Care Base Rate. She delineated that in 2013 the department contracted out help in developing a methodology to appropriately determine a daily rate for foster care that included the average cost of living in the country, and a cost of living multiplier for Alaska. She noted that the cost of living in Alaska was significantly higher than it is in other states. The department currently shifted to using the cost of living for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Urban West Region versus the entire country. It allowed DCFS to appropriately align the base rate to the cost of living in Alaska. The increase amounted to \$1.4 million in federal funds and \$3.6 million UGF. She reiterated that the \$1 million GF increase in legal services was in support of the lawsuit. She continued that OCS UGF was comprised of GF, GF Mental Health, and GF match. The other category was made up entirely of interagency receipts (IA) and OCS was subject to the technical salary increases.

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Representative Hannan asked how long it had been since the foster care base rate had been adjusted. Ms. Sweet replied that it had last been adjusted in 2018. Representative Hannan shared that she had heard that many foster care families had been lost for a variety of reasons. She wondered whether the state would be able to meet the demand for foster care families with the rate increase. Commissioner Kovol responded that the department felt that the increase would sustain current foster families and possibly attract new resource families. She noted that there were not many children in custodial care in institutions.

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Representative Coulombe appreciated the work of the commissioner. She thanked them for their honesty and owning their challenges. She asked for a status update of the five year Mental Health Trust plan. Commissioner Kovol answered that that plan was in its final stages and some changes were made since the prior plan. She indicated that the working group redid the entire plan. She anticipated that the plan would be presented within the next few months.

Co-Chair Foster invited any final comments.

Commissioner Kovol acknowledged DFCS's challenges and thanked the committee for the opportunity to share the progress the department made in addressing them.

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HB 268 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 270 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the agenda for the following day.

#

ADJOURNMENT

[3:17:43 PM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 3:17 p.m.