

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
March 14, 2024
5:06 p.m.

5:06:06 PM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Johnson called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 5:06 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

Representative Maxine Dibert.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Kristin Papp, Self, Fairbanks; Christina Turman, Self, Fairbanks; Rachel Libby, Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living, Fairbanks; Kara Carlson, Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living, Fairbanks; Laura Capelle, Self, Fairbanks; Emily Fossum, Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living, Fairbanks; Mariko Kinikin, Self, Fairbanks; June Rogers, Self, Fairbanks; Brie Goldstein, Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living, Fairbanks; Brandy Harty, Self, Fairbanks; Brenda McFarlane, Crisis Now Coordinator, City of Fairbanks, Fairbanks; Kendra Cringan, Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living, Fairbanks;

Sarah Lewis, Self, Fairbanks; Julie Houghton, Self, Fairbanks; Molly Payne, elf, Fairbanks; Leigh Bolin, Resource Center for Parents and Children, Alaska Children's Alliance, Fairbanks; Brooke Freeburg, Self, Fairbanks; Marjorie Richards, Self, Fairbanks; Shanah Kinison, Self, Haines; Adam Freeburg, Self, Fairbanks; Samuel Harris, Self, Fairbanks; Emily Ice, Step-In Autism Services, Fairbanks; Rita Davis, Self, Fairbanks; Bobby Burgess, Self, Fairbanks; Diana Lienberger, Self, Fairbanks; Deborah Towbridge, President, Alaska Head Start Association, Nome; Casie Warner, Self, Seward; Bonnie Mund, Self, Fairbanks; April Charmley, Self, Anchorage; Jesse Hensel, Self, Fairbanks; Lesa Meath, Self, Fairbanks; Janis Johnson, Board Treasurer, Advocates for Victims of Violence, Valdez; Gianna Giusti, Board Vice President, Advocates for Victims of Violence, Valdez; Rowena Palomar, Advocates for Victims of Violence, Valdez; Tina Russel, Direct Services Coordinator, Advocates for Victims of Violence, Valdez; Andrea Goryl, Nurse Practitioner, Tundra Women's Coalition, Bethel; CJ Pleasant, Deputy Director, Tundra Women's Coalition, Bethel; Laurie Overbay, Self, Fairbanks; Janet Johnson, Self, Cordova; Peter Hoepfner, President, Cordova Family Resource Center, Cordova.

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.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY:

FAIRBANKS, BETHEL, CORDOVA, KOTZEBUE, NOME, VALDEZ,
WRANGELL, UTQIAGVIK, OFF NETS

Co-Chair Johnson reviewed the meeting agenda.

#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."

^PUBLIC TESTIMONY: FAIRBANKS, BETHEL, CORDOVA, KOTZEBUE, NOME, VALDEZ, WRANGELL, UTQIAGVIK, OFF NETS

[5:08:46 PM](#)

AT EASE

[5:09:15 PM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Johnson OPENED public testimony.

Co-Chair Johnson relayed that Representative Tomaszewski would be the chair for the next portion of the meeting.

Representative Tomaszewski prompted the testifiers to begin.

[5:10:30 PM](#)

KRISTIN PAPP, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), expressed her support for education funding. She thanked the committee members who voted to increase the Base Student Allocation (BSA) and pass SB 140. She argued that people would not want to move to Alaska or remain in Alaska if education was not funded. She requested that the legislature fully fund the Alaska Reads Act in addition to the BSA. Schools build community and act as the support system for many children. She shared that a peer in her child's class experienced the loss of a parent and the school immediately provided counselling and support for the

entire class. She added that her son was at a charter school for a while, but he moved to a public school because he did not have a great teacher and her son was much happier at the local school.

5:14:10 PM

CHRISTINA TURMAN, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), shared that she was born and raised in Fairbanks and intended to raise her kids in Fairbanks, but she was considering moving due to the dire school system situation. Her children attended a school that was presently being considered for closure. She stressed that the future of Alaska's schools was in the hands of the legislature. Some of the many issues were the following: class sizes had increased insurmountably, fewer options for art programs, teachers were underpaid and overworked, test scores were at an all-time low, and school closures were becoming more common. She did not think it was an issue of irresponsible spending, but an issue of the government not prioritizing education. She wanted the legislature to be innovative and work together to find sustainable solutions. She emphasized that schools would continue to close and the cycle would continue if there were no changes. She reminded legislators that the individuals most impacted were not democrats, nor republicans, but children.

5:17:26 PM

RACHEL LIBBY, INTERIOR ALASKA CENTER FOR NON-VIOLENT LIVING, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), advocated for an increase in funding for victims' services under the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA). She shared that she was responsible for overseeing the sexual assault response team for the Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living (IACNVL). The advocates for sexual assault prevention provided services to survivors who had experienced sexual assault and were interested in receiving medical care. When a victim arrived at the hospital, the team was alerted and would arrive to support the victim within 45 minutes. The advocate provided information about services, accompanied the victim to forensic interviews and examinations, and ensured there was a safe place to go after leaving the hospital. She shared that IACNVL provided services within the Fairbanks North Star Borough and the 42 surrounding villages in the interior. The center needed

reliable funding to allow it to provide the services that victims needed and deserved.

Representative Tomaszewski noted that Representative Maxine Dibert was present in the audience.

Representative Stapp thanked Ms. Libby for her testimony.

Representative Tomaszewski offered a reminder that the testimony was intended to be focused on HB 268 and HB 270.

[5:20:48 PM](#)

KARA CARLSON, INTERIOR ALASKA CENTER FOR NON-VIOLENT LIVING, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), shared that her family had twice benefited from violent crime compensation. She requested that the legislature add \$4 million back into the budget for victims' services. She reported that Alaska had the highest rates of sexual assault in the nation and reducing violence and preventing crime should be a top priority for the state. With the rise of inflation and funding remaining flat, IACNVL had to cut hours to 30 per week in order to stay afloat. She emphasized that staff worked incredibly hard with individuals on what was often one of the individual's worst days. Reducing funding increased the workload for staff and made it more difficult to recruit and retain staff. She reiterated that the \$4 million in funding should be restored to the budget.

[5:23:11 PM](#)

LAURA CAPELLE, SELF, FAIRBANKS, thanked the committee for passing SB 140 which she saw as an example of bipartisan cooperation. She supported the inclusion of vital education funding in the budget and the BSA increase in SB 140. There were four schools in Fairbanks that were being considered for closure as one of the ways to compensate for unsecured funding. She urged the committee to support education funding to avoid school closures.

[5:25:12 PM](#)

EMILY FOSSUM, INTERIOR ALASKA CENTER FOR NON-VIOLENT LIVING, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), worked as an advocate against sexual assault and violence. She was testifying to request an increase in funding for victims' services. Alaska had the highest rates of domestic violence

and sexual violence in the country. Despite limited resources, the center supported victims in many ways, such as helping victims through sobriety treatments, obtaining domestic violence protective orders, reunification with the victims' children, housing, and ongoing safety planning. The budget cuts proposed would increase the workload of existing staff and negatively impact staff's ability to emotionally support clients. She argued that the \$4 million cut was not being taken from agencies, but from victims. She urged reconsidering the cuts and restoring the funds to the budget.

[5:27:47 PM](#)

MARIKO KINIKIN, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), requested that the legislature fully fund schools. She found that the BSA was \$5,680 in 2014 and \$5,930 in 2023, which was a difference of only \$250 dollars. She was a teacher in 2014 and school environments were vastly different than schools today. The technological advancements alone would account for the \$250 increase. She noted that technology was moving towards a subscription model which greatly impacted schools and the online resources schools could afford. Costs had significantly increased but funding had not increased with it. She urged for education funding to be increased.

[5:29:46 PM](#)

JUNE ROGERS, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), relayed that she was born in Fairbanks and she had been involved in advocacy for numerous community efforts. She had been listening to the testimony and she agreed with the comments of every testifier. Communities could thrive if all citizens worked together. She did not agree with reducing the amount of time, effort, and dollars for community health programs, which she argued were essential. She was frustrated that the state continued to not fully support community efforts and programs. She understood the circumstances under which the legislature worked, but discussing how the state should move forward was a better discussion than the "slicing and dicing" of dollars. There was no topic that was more important than education and behavioral health and the budgets needed to reflect the importance. There needed to be discussion around the funding that was necessary to move forward. She argued that the state could not say that it did not have funds because

funds were simply not being allocated wisely. She urged that the design of the budget be more carefully considered.

Representative Tomaszewski announced that he would pass the gavel to Representative Stapp who would assume the responsibility of chairing the meeting.

5:35:02 PM

AT EASE

5:35:38 PM

RECONVENED

Representative Stapp began chairing the meeting and invited testifiers to begin.

5:36:05 PM

BRIE GOLDSTEIN, INTERIOR ALASKA CENTER FOR NON-VIOLENT LIVING, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), requested that the funding for CDVSA grants be increased. As proposed, the budget would result in the shelter reducing hours and would require that the shelter operate with one employee at a time. She shared that working alone at the shelter was a common occurrence. She offered an example of what it looked like to work alone at a busy shelter. If she took a phone call from a victim of domestic violence in immediate need and another individual was at the door looking for food and warm clothes, she had to juggle both individuals who both needed her entire attention. She did not want to turn away someone in need, but she had to quickly assess whether an individual would cause harm to herself or others at the shelter. She stressed that funding was truly being used to directly assist individuals in dire need.

5:38:31 PM

BRANDY HARTY, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), shared that as a child in the public school system in the state, she benefited from well-paid and highly educated teachers with strong retirement packages and small class sizes. She knew she had received a world-class education when she graduated in 2002 which had prepared her to be anything she wanted to be. She relayed that what she wanted to be most was a teacher in Alaska. She was now a dual-certified special elementary education teacher with two children in the public school system. Over the past 20 years, wages had

stagnated and the retirement and benefits system was now the worst in the country. The education her children were receiving was far worse than the education she received when she was in school. She urged that the state prioritize children and their education. She requested that the legislature place funding for schools at the top of the priority list and vote to maintain an increased BSA.

[5:40:46 PM](#)

BRENDA MCFARLANE, CRISIS NOW COORDINATOR, CITY OF FAIRBANKS, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), advocated for increased funding for the Crisis Now grants. She thought that many behavioral health needs in the state could be met in less costly and less traumatic ways. The same individuals experiencing behavioral health crises were often toted back and forth to hospitals and emergency rooms by police officers because crisis centers had no availability. She believed that crisis services were essential services and the state needed to fund the services. Restoring \$1 million for crisis services would be a sign of good faith. Investing in crisis care was necessary and worthwhile for all residents. Alaska had one of the highest rates of traumatic brain injuries in the nation, which could result in mental health issues. Building a system of crisis care made sense, especially when examining the cost of suicides, domestic violence, and substance abuse in the state. The state paid for its lack of a working system with the lives of its citizens.

[5:43:23 PM](#)

KENDRA CRINGAN, INTERIOR ALASKA CENTER FOR NON-VIOLENT LIVING, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), advocated for increased funding for the Crisis Now grants. The funding directly impacted victims' services and victims of violent crime. As an advocate, she spent the entirety of her working day communicating with victims and assisting victims in a multitude of ways. The mental load of helping victims experiencing crises was burdensome, but she could not afford the cost of counseling because wages were low. Advocates' wages began at \$22 per hour, which was competitive with fast food wages and retail wages. She was working shifts with a bare minimum level of support and was often the only staff member working at a time. Burn out among advocates was common and led to less and less resources for an already vulnerable population. She urged

increased funding for Crisis Now grants for the betterment of the community.

[5:45:47 PM](#)

SARAH LEWIS, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), requested that legislators continue to fight for SB 140 if the governor vetoes the bill. She argued that current practices were discriminatory and every school that was within an incorporated city or borough was at a disadvantage. The model used for federal impact reimbursement was not adequately serving Alaskans. She relayed that Alaska was the only state that used the second of two disbursement options offered by the federal government and she requested that the legislature should reevaluate the choice and its impact. The legislature's support for the BSA was a breath of fresh air but it was not enough to save education. The quality of a state's public schools impacted each and every aspect of the state. She shared that many of the individuals she spoke with who were leaving the state were leaving because of the lack of adequate child care and education funding. She stressed that education funding should be taken seriously when people were choosing to leave Alaska due to the state of the schools.

[5:48:43 PM](#)

JULIE HOUGHTON, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), expressed support for the Mobile Crisis Team and crisis stabilization grants. She had been a nurse for 40 years and a behavioral health advocate for 11 years. She argued that it was crucial that crisis teams were financially supported. The crisis team and its organizers had developed a program that directly helped Fairbanks' most vulnerable citizens. The team had averted 52 calls away from the police department in Fairbanks in the last month alone, which represented a substantial savings to the police department. She emphasized that it was paramount that the crisis teams had the resources to support victims and meet the needs of the community, and Fairbanks was in need of more resource to properly support the population. Fairbanks lacked warming shelters, housing, and treatment centers, which made the care provided by crisis teams in the first 24 hours even more important.

[5:51:19 PM](#)

MOLLY PAYNE, SELF, FAIRBANKS, urged the increased funding of public education. She argued that well-funded schools helped children develop the necessary tools to be successful. She was concerned about the quality of schooling and opportunities that would be available for her future children. She stressed that children suffered the consequences of inadequate funding, but the community and economy suffered as well as a result.

[5:53:35 PM](#)

LEIGH BOLIN, RESOURCE CENTER FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN, ALASKA CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified in regard to a budget shortage for child advocacy centers and organizations. She requested that \$4 million be added to the CDVSA grants. The advocacy centers were designed to be a child-friendly and neutral setting to provide assistance to children who experienced abuse. The advocates at the center were available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. The centers worked alongside law enforcement, medical partners, and tribal organizations when there were allegations of child abuse. The centers were statutorily mandated to assist in situations of child abuse. She echoed that Alaska was the state in the nation with the highest number of sexual abuse cases and the second highest number of child abuse cases. The centers were facing significant budget cuts and would directly impact services provided to children. The funding was directly allocated to frontline employees working with children and families and there was no funding for costs such as rent or supplies. She stressed that a funding cut of any kind would be devastating.

[5:55:28 PM](#)

BROOKE FREEBURG, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), relayed that she had emailed three of the committee members to express her gratitude for their support of SB 140. She reminded members that children needed to be a priority in the state. She asked the legislature to override any veto that may come and to continue to support a BSA increase of at least \$680.

[5:56:48 PM](#)

MARJORIE RICHARDS, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), shared that child advocacy centers were facing drastic cuts in federal funding for 2025. She was a former board member of the Resource Center for Parents and Children in Fairbanks, which ran a child advocacy center. The center provided medical exams, coordinated with law enforcement, and provided mental and physical support for victims of abuse and neglect. She requested that the legislature return \$4 million to the budget for victims' services.

[5:58:24 PM](#)

SHANAH KINISON, SELF, HAINES (via teleconference), requested that the legislature allocate more funds for home health care in the budget. She was a caregiver and she and her coworkers were living paycheck-to-paycheck with no benefits or security. She was highly concerned about the future of home health care if funding levels continued to drop. She had been trying to recruit another caregiver for her client for over a year and had not been successful. Caregivers made possible the lives of elders, people with disabilities, and children but the work was not valued. A lack of funding devalued her work and the rights of the clients to live at home with dignity. Caregivers needed higher wages, support, and security. She felt unappreciated and disposable and thought that the most urgent way to spend money was to benefit those who were most vulnerable.

[6:01:29 PM](#)

ADAM FREEBURG, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), relayed that he was a parent of public school children and expressed his support for SB 140. He expressed particular gratitude for Representative Tomaszewski's vote to pass SB 40 as Representative Tomaszewski was his representative. He hoped that Representative Tomaszewski would stand by his vote if the bill was vetoed and there was a subsequent effort to override the veto. The BSA in 2024 was only about \$250 more than it was in 2014. There was a constitutional requirement for the legislature to adequately fund schools and SB 140 was a good start by increasing funding to schools. He argued that school districts needed all funding that could be made available. He urged the legislature to also address the disparities in local contributions between unincorporated areas of the state and incorporated areas.

[6:04:01 PM](#)

SAMUEL HARRIS, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), asked for increased funding for home care that went to the caregivers and not the agencies. He was a caregiver and he spent a significant amount of money out of pocket in order to support his clients, and many caregivers experienced the same loss of funds. He had lost money giving rides to clients because the agencies did not have enough funding to reimburse him for the gas or wear-and-tear on his car. He argued that caregivers deserved reimbursement for services and better wages overall.

[6:05:19 PM](#)

EMILY ICE, STEP-IN AUTISM SERVICES, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), shared that there were 88 families on the waitlist to receive services from Step-In Autism Services. She was concerned about the unintentional discrimination against kids with autism in the Alaska Medicaid program. Many families on the waitlist had no alternative options and faced consequences such as preventable accidents. The current structure of autism services was adopted in 2018 and since then, all other community behavioral-health services received a total inflation adjustment of 12.76 percent, but autism services had seen no such adjustment. The lack of inflationary adjustments had led to growing wait lists sometimes exceeding two years across the state. She urged the legislature to include a 12.76 one-time adjustment to autism services to address inflation. The services prevented more expensive and intensive care and would allow children with autism to remain in their homes and communities.

[6:07:30 PM](#)

RITA DAVIS, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), shared that she was a caregiver and requested that the legislature add more funding in the budget for caregiver. She explained that people of all ages needed care. Caregivers were underpaid, overworked, and stressed because there was not enough funding available to enable caregivers to provide the necessary level of care. The state needed caregivers and caregivers needed more money.

[6:09:24 PM](#)

BOBBY BURGESS, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), understood that the job of the legislature was to provide adequate funding for education. He reminded members that school boards across the state asked for a BSA increase of no less than \$1,413 just to maintain current services and a buying power that would be roughly equivalent to 2017. Although SB 140 proposed an increase of \$680, he was grateful for any help that could be provided. He hoped that legislators would act with integrity and uphold their votes if a veto override was necessary. Over \$50 million had been cut from the Fairbanks North Star Borough's (FNSB) budget and there was nothing left to cut. The district was considering closing schools and increasing class sizes to an average of 30 kids in elementary schools and 35 in high school. He had heard some legislators say that they did not understand what was being bought when education was funded, and he argued that the answer was staff. Education was how work forces were developed and ensured that adult citizens were informed about history and civics when they graduated from the public school system. By funding education, the state was buying informed and responsible citizens ready to participate in civics and democracy, thriving neighborhoods, and strong communities. Funding education meant buying a functional society.

[6:12:03 PM](#)

DIANA LIENBERGER, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), testified in support of education funding as she supported public schools and wanted schools to be adequately funded. She requested that legislators implement all elements of SB 140 and asked that legislators stand behind their vote should the governor choose to veto the bill. The legislature was constitutionally required to maintain the state's public schools, and she argued that schools must be adequately funded in order for schools to be considered maintained. Many working-age people were leaving the state, which was holding back economic growth. She stressed that if the education system was not improved upon, people would continue to leave Alaska.

[6:13:54 PM](#)

AT EASE

[6:14:22 PM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Foster began chairing the meeting and prompted testifiers to begin.

[6:14:53 PM](#)

DEBORAH TOWBRIDGE, PRESIDENT, ALASKA HEAD START ASSOCIATION, NOME (via teleconference), thanked Co-Chair Foster for making the Head Start program a priority and personally visiting the program in Nome. She expressed gratitude for the recommendation to increase Head Start funding by \$5 million. The increase would allow the 17 Head Start programs to meet the required 20 percent non-federal-share match which would keep \$32 million federal dollars in the state. The children served by Head Start were those with greatest needs in the community and were often homeless or in foster care and the program provided comprehensive services to vulnerable children and families. She emphasized that the program provided services that benefited children, families, and the economy. Additional funding would enable the program to increase staff wages and recruit and retain necessary staff in order to sustain services. She asked that the committee maintain the \$5 million increase in funding.

Co-Chair Foster shared that he enjoyed his time visiting with the kids in the Head Start program and looked forward to returning.

[6:17:53 PM](#)

CASIE WARNER, SELF, SEWARD (via teleconference), urged that legislators support a \$30.5 million increase to child care benefits in the operating budget. She continued to hear about working families leaving the state due to inadequate child care. Due to the out migrations, Seward was losing many services that were required for it to function as a year-round community. The economy of the state continued to be negatively impacted due to the lack of child care.

[6:19:27 PM](#)

BONNIE MUND, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), appreciated the hard work of the legislature on SB 140. She hoped that any SB 140 veto would be overridden. There were many vital programs in Fairbanks schools being cut, such as band and orchestra. She urged that legislators treat

education as a foundational component of the state and of society.

[6:22:06 PM](#)

APRIL CHARMLEY, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), shared that she was speaking as a recovered traumatized adult. She wanted to highlight the voices of recovered adults living in Anchorage who needed services. Everyone needed housing and it would always be difficult for any victim to get back on their feet. She relayed that Anchorage was the most dangerous and diverse city in Alaska and traumatized adults needed the chance to recover. She argued that a reduced budget would only hurt victims. The funding needed to be increased and there needed to be more victims' advocates.

Co-Chair Foster noted that the testimony cutoff was in six minutes. He offered the resources to enable individuals to submit written testimony.

[6:26:16 PM](#)

JESSE HENSEL, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), appreciated the BSA increase in SB 140 and hoped that all legislators would stand by their votes to fund public education in Alaska.

[6:27:30 PM](#)

LESA MEATH, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), thought that funding needed to focus on raising the BSA. There were multiple schools in Fairbanks being considered for closure and many others were being downsized. Class sizes were larger and districts were unable to hire aides or qualified teachers. She argued that the suggestion by the governor to offer teachers a bonus as a recruitment method was not evidence-based or proven to be effective. The efforts of states that had tried offering bonuses for the purpose of teacher recruitment had failed. Community members and school boards knew what decisions made the most sense to meet local needs. Everyone wanted quality educators and optimal learning environments for kids. All students across the state deserved to be prioritized in the budget.

[6:29:40 PM](#)

JANIS JOHNSON, BOARD TREASURER, ADVOCATES FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE, VALDEZ (via teleconference), shared that the Advocates for Victims of Violence (AVV) had been providing services to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence for more than 43 years. She explained that Valdez was hundreds of miles from the nearest shelters. She relayed that AVV was part of the justice system emergency rooms and provided services to victims and survivors 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. The ADD shelters had been at capacity for the last few years and the services provided were vital. The shelters often had to send victims to hotels and bed and breakfasts in order to give everyone a place to stay. Advocates employed by ADD accompanied victims through medical examinations, law enforcement proceedings, helped victims navigate the justice system and retain a pro-bono lawyer, helped victims find a job and a place to live, and assisted with divorce and child custody as needed. The costs and commodities at the shelter were high and recruiting and retaining qualified employees was difficult. The shelters could not pay employees competitive wages with the funding provided and advocates made the same wages as the employees in the local grocery store. She urged that the legislature increase the funding for victims' services.

[6:32:49 PM](#)

GIANNA GIUSTI, BOARD VICE PRESIDENT, ADVOCATES FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE, VALDEZ (via teleconference), requested that the legislature increase the funding for victims' services. As a school counselor, she had seen the impacts of child abuse, domestic violence, and sexual assault on her students. Working with shelter staff had helped her find resources and better communicate with victims. The AVV shelters offered after-school programs and she was able to refer children to the programs. One of the most important things the children learned in the programs was how to pass on information on how to call for help to a parent experiencing domestic violence. Using the programs presented a chance to build connections and relationships with safe adults in the community. She explained that AVV also provided child advocacy services to children staying at the shelter. She encouraged everyone to help provide children with a safe environment.

[6:35:40 PM](#)

ROWENA PALOMAR, ADVOCATES FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE, VALDEZ (via teleconference), indicated that she was an advocate working at AVV and read a statement from a client. The client requested that funding for victims' services be increased. The client had been a pastor in Valdez for 43 years and appreciated the services provided to victims through AVV. The client had seen many times the ways in which the services had helped victims survive and move forward and urged that funding be increased.

[6:37:39 PM](#)

TINA RUSSEL, DIRECT SERVICES COORDINATOR, ADVOCATES FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE, VALDEZ (via teleconference), explained that AVV was the only organization providing crisis intervention, shelter, advocacy, and other essential support to a region of over 1,000 square miles. Due to the large region, travel was often a concern and AVV coordinated with local law enforcement to help take victims out of communities at the earliest possible opportunity. The healing process for victims was different depending upon the person, which was why AVV continued to work with victims once the judicial process had concluded. She urged that funding be increased.

[6:40:38 PM](#)

ANDREA GORYL, NURSE PRACTICIONER, TUNDRA WOMEN'S COALITION, BETHEL (via teleconference), testified to increase funding for victims' services within CDVSA. She explained that her primary duty was performing medical exams for victims of sexual assault and child abuse. She echoed that Alaska had the highest rates of sexual assault in the country and that the Bethel region had twice the number of sexual assaults than the Alaska state average. The Tundra Women's Coalition had a strong team that included medical practitioners, advocates, and law enforcement. Without the services provided by the coalition, it would not be possible to fully support victims during a traumatic event. The coalition worked collaboratively to provide complete services to victims and the victims expressed gratitude for the coalition's work. Victims had told her that the coalition had allowed them to obtain appropriate behavioral health services and become sober. Most victims told her that the coalition had helped them have hope for the future. She requested that the legislature refrain from

cutting funding from the coalition because it would be devastating to victims and to the community.

[6:43:41 PM](#)

CJ PLEASANT, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, TUNDRA WOMEN'S COALITION, BEHTEL (via teleconference), relayed that funding for victims' services had greatly increased the capacity of the coalition to help people in need. The funding helped the coalition hire skilled employees, such as individuals who could speak Alaska Native languages as well as English. Language barriers often negatively impacted the ability of a victim to get the appropriate kind of help.

[6:45:57 PM](#)

LAURIE OVERBAY, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), asked for increased funding for home care that would be allocated to the caregivers and not the agencies. Caregivers paid for gas, transportation, and sometimes food and were not reimbursed. Caregivers also often worked beyond scheduled hours and were not paid for their time. She thought that elders and people with disabilities deserved to live at home, which would not be possible without caregivers. The caregiving jobs were not desirable because the pay was low and there were no benefits. She hoped that the legislature would see to it that the funding for home care be allocated to caregivers, elders, and people with disabilities.

[6:48:09 PM](#)

JANET JOHNSON, SELF, CORDOVA (via teleconference), shared that she had a daughter who was impacted by multiple disabilities and needed support 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Her daughter moved from Cordova to Anchorage in order to find more social opportunities and career opportunities. She was glad that family members of individuals with disabilities were now allowed to receive pay to care for their loved ones. She was willing to quit her job in Cordova and move to Anchorage to be a full-time caretaker for her daughter; however, the fact that she would need to go through an agency in order to get hired was a barrier. She would not be able to take care of her own basic needs such as rent and food if she were to transition to full-time caregiving for her daughter. She requested that funding for home care be increased and be allocated to the caregivers.

[6:50:47 PM](#)

PETER HOEPFNER, PRESIDENT, CORDOVA FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER, CORDOVA (via teleconference), relayed that the mission of the Cordova Family Resource Center was to promote healthy individual and family relationships throughout the community by providing prevention education, advocacy, and crisis response. The center offered many services such as a 24-hour help line, summer camps, and social programs. The center also helped individuals navigate state programs and the judicial system. The advocates at the center were called to help victims in domestic violence cases and helped facilitate services with the Office of Children's Services (OCS). The center's main funding source was the grants from CDVSA, though the center's executive director was always seeking out other smaller grants. If funding for victims' services were cut, it would have a significant and negative impact on the center. The cut would likely prevent the center from building the domestic violence shelter that was currently in the planning stages. He expressed his appreciation for the work done by the legislature.

[6:54:27 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster commented that there were over 40 testifiers during the meeting. He thanked everyone for sharing their testimony.

Co-Chair Foster CLOSED public testimony.

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

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

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

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ADJOURNMENT

[6:56:07 PM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 6:56 p.m.