

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE

April 18, 2024

1:36 p.m.

1:36:01 PM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Edgmon called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 1:36 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

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Frank Tomaszewski

ALSO PRESENT

Jason Custer, Vice President, Alaska Power and Telephone, Southeast Conference; Robert Venables, Executive Director, Southeast Conference; Millie Ryan, President, Alaska Mobility Coalition.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Mason Villarma, City and Borough of Wrangell Manager, Wrangell; Janette Bower, City Manager, Soldotna; Colleen Dushkin, Executive Director, Association of Alaska Housing Authorities, Anchorage; Mariyam Medovaya, Alaska Trails, Anchorage; Bob Scanlon, CEO, Blood Bank of Alaska, Anchorage; Rob Urbach, CEO, Iditarod, Mat-Su; Bruce Friend, Self, Homer; Chris Mello, Board Member, Blood Bank of Alaska, Anchorage; Sean Case, Deputy Chief Police, Anchorage Police Department and Board Member, Blood Bank of Alaska, Anchorage; Kimberly Hankins, Superintendent, Lower

Kuskokwim School District, Bethel; Patricia Phillips, Mayor, City of Pelican; Nils Andreassen, Alaska Municipal League, Juneau; Michelle Baker, Executive Vice President, Southcentral Foundation, Anchorage; Bob Sivertsen, Chairman, Southeast Alaska Power Agency, Ketchikan; Caroline Venuti, Self, Homer; Craig Ambrosiani, Seward County Community Health Center, Seward; Caroline Storm, Executive Director, The Coalition for Education Equity, Anchorage; Kirk Rose, CEO, Anchorage Community and Land Trust, Anchorage; Chris Reitan, Superintendent, Craig City School District, Craig; Lisa Parady, Executive Director, Alaska Council of School Administrators, Juneau; Eric Gurley, Executive Director, ACCESS Alaska Inc., Anchorage; Tom Atkinson, CEO, Kotzebue Electric Association, Kotzebue; Kurt Buchholz, Board Member, Blood Bank of Alaska, Soldotna; Peter Haeussler, Self, Wrangell; Art Geuss, Self, Anchorage; Tim Potter, Anchorage Skates, Anchorage.

SUMMARY

HB 269        APPROP: CAP; REAPPROP

HB 269 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

CSSB 187(FIN) am

      APPROP: CAP; REAPPROP

CSSB 187(FIN) am was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Edgmon reviewed the meeting agenda. He reviewed public testimony protocol and provided call in numbers.

#hb269

#sb187

HOUSE BILL NO. 269

"An Act making appropriations, including capital appropriations and other appropriations; making reappropriations; making appropriations to capitalize funds; and providing for an effective date."

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 187(FIN) am

"An Act making appropriations, including capital appropriations, supplemental appropriations, and other

appropriations; making reappropriations; making appropriations to capitalize funds; amending appropriations; and providing for an effective date."

[1:38:10 PM](#)

^PUBLIC TESTIMONY

[1:38:16 PM](#)

AT EASE

[1:39:17 PM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Edgmon OPENED public testimony.

JASON CUSTER, VICE PRESIDENT, ALASKA POWER AND TELEPHONE, SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE, shared that he chaired the Energy Committee for Southeast Conference. He stated Alaska Power and Telephone was headquartered in Ketchikan. He asked the committee to fully fund Alaska Energy Authority (AEA) projects. He read from prepared remarks. He encourage support for the Renewable Energy Fund program. The current budget did not have sufficient funding for the fund. He stated affordable options for the future were needed. It made the process more transparent and inclusive of the public. He stated the fund provided an incredible bang for the buck

Representative Hannan understood the REF had a list of projects. She wondered how many more projects could be funded if the full funding was provided.

Mr. Custer answered that there were currently only two projects funded.

Representative Ortiz referenced Mr. Custer's statement that the funding leveraged other investments. He asked whether the company would qualify for more federal funding.

Mr. Custer responded that there were a lot of ways, and the company had a request for \$100,000. He stated if there was a federal project being used as matching funds, the company paid for front end planning that could be harder to fund many projects that would not have come to fruition otherwise had been accomplished due to the REF.

Co-Chair Edgmon stated he thought it was an accurate statement.

[1:45:39 PM](#)

ROBERT VENABLES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE, echoed the remarks provided by Mr. Custer. He stressed the importance of energy security to the state. He asked for full support for the AEA projects. He advocated for the Village Corporation in Craig, Alaska mariculture programs. He viewed it as a statewide model to support rural communities in the mariculture industry.

[1:47:58 PM](#)

MILLIE RYAN, PRESIDENT, ALASKA MOBILITY COALITION, shared that the AMC was a nonprofit organization with the mission to develop increased public transit to enable Alaskans who did not drive to get to appointments, work, church, the store, and other locations. She recommended the addition of \$1 million for the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT/PF) to allow the state to maximize federal funding and provide nonfederal match funding to help seniors and people with disabilities to be a part of their community.

[1:49:54 PM](#)

MASON VILLARMA, CITY AND BOROUGH OF WRANGELL MANAGER, WRANGELL (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) for school major maintenance. He believed the current amount was a step in the right direction, but additional funding was needed. He requested the amount within SB 187.

[1:51:39 PM](#)

JANETTE BOWER, CITY MANAGER, SOLDOTNA (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Soldotna regional sports complex project. The complex was designed in the 1980s for multipurpose use, but was now not ideal to meet community needs and lacked amenities the facility was overdue for an upgrade.

[1:53:30 PM](#)

COLLEEN DUSHKIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATION OF ALASKA HOUSING AUTHORITIES, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), provided information about AHA. She spoke about the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) programs included in the capital budget including the supplemental housing grant program.

Representative Josephson asked for a repeat of the numbers.

Ms. Dushkin answered \$4 million for the supplemental housing program, \$3 million senior housing development, and \$7 million for weatherization.

[1:56:19 PM](#)

MARIYAM MEDOVAYA, ALASKA TRAILS, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), shared information about the organization. She supported funding for the Alaska Long Trail project. She thanked the committee for including more than \$5 million for the project over the past several years. She thanked the Senate for including over \$3 million in the current budget. She thanked the committee for its work on the budget.

[1:58:29 PM](#)

BOB SCANLON, CEO, BLOOD BANK OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), shared information about the nonprofit. He thanked the legislature for including \$2 million for the Blood Bank in a previous session.

Representative Galvin appreciated how broadly the Blood Bank supplied for Alaska including rural areas. She asked if the organization also covered the military bases.

Mr. Scanlon replied affirmatively. The organization also served the Native organizations.

[2:02:50 PM](#)

ROB URBACH, CEO, IDITAROD, MAT-SU (via teleconference), the organization was a key item for tourism bringing in funding for 20 plus other events that served as Iditarod qualifiers. Sustaining the Alaska icon had become extremely difficult because of "eco-terrorists" with information built on false pretenses. The attacks had resulted in the crippling loss of sponsorship.

[2:05:42 PM](#)

BRUCE FRIEND, SELF, HOMER (via teleconference), spoke in support the need for matching funds for the corps of engineers feasibility study related to the harbor. He also supported funds for the high school for roof replacement. He supported \$250,000 to replace the roof on the Pratt museum.

[2:07:56 PM](#)

CHRIS MELLO, BOARD MEMBER, BLOOD BANK OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for the blood bank. He stated there were only about 6 labs nationwide

SEAN CASE, DEPUTY CHIEF POLICE, ANCHORAGE POLICE DEPARTMENT AND BOARD MEMBER, BLOOD BANK OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in funding for the Blood Bank of Alaska. He remarked that weather and natural disasters impacted the ability to test blood.

Co-Chair Edgmon noted that Co-Chair Johnson had joined the meeting 30 minutes earlier. He welcomed Representative Jennie Armstrong in the room. He noted the call-in deadline of 2:30 p.m. He provided email addresses and phone numbers for public testimony.

[2:13:13 PM](#)

KIMBERLY HANKINS, SUPERINTENDENT, LOWER KUSKOKWIM SCHOOL DISTRICT, BETHEL (via teleconference), supported funding for school district major maintenance and the Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) fund. She knew it was not the only school district struggling to keep schools open due to major maintenance needs.

Representative Galvin asked about the name of the community.

Co-Chair Edgmon stated that it was Novachuk.

Ms. Hankins agreed.

Representative Josephson asked if the items were in the budget.

Ms. Hankins replied that she was requesting that the items in the budget remain funded and she was always asking for additional funding.

Representative Ortiz asked if Ms. Hankins was asking for funding. He thought the governor's budget only funded two projects.

Ms. Hankins was calling in support of funding currently in SB 187.

Co-Chair Edgmon noted that the Senate added \$36 million to the list.

[2:18:11 PM](#)

PATRICIA PHILLIPS, MAYOR, CITY OF PELICAN (via teleconference), requested \$700,474 from the REF fund for hydroelectric project, the application requested funding for the fish habitat restoration plan and projects related to clean energy.

Representative Galvin believed the project was on a list of 16 projects. She wondered where on the list.

Someone on the committee indicated number 6.

Representative Galvin asked for more information.

Co-Chair Edgmon stated that the governor had requested \$5 million and the Senate reduced it to \$4 million.

[2:20:35 PM](#)

NILS ANDREASSEN, ALASKA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE, JUNEAU (via teleconference), thanked the committee for continued support for municipalities in the state. He appreciated the funds in the budget for AHFC and encouraged additional funds, specifically funding for water and sewer projects. e remarked that the code blue program remained important. He spoke to food security, and the issues around STIP approval. He supported funding for the harbor matching grants because the funding was important for local communities. He spoke to issues related to economic growth and public safety.

[2:24:32 PM](#)

MICHELLE BAKER, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, SOUTHCENTRAL FOUNDATION, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), she served the behavioral services division of the foundation. She supported funding to build a crisis stabilization center and residential center in Anchorage. She strongly encouraged the committee to support the capital request. She thanked the committee for its time.

[2:27:22 PM](#)

BOB SIVERTSEN, CHAIRMAN, SOUTHEAST ALASKA POWER AGENCY, KETCHIKAN (via teleconference), stated that energy was critical to infrastructure, and if there was not an opportunity for funding in the regional grant then there should be a consideration to make a direct appropriation through the AEA for moving the project forward.

[2:29:23 PM](#)

CAROLINE VENUTI, SELF, HOMER (via teleconference), supported funding for the Homer harbor, and stated that the city had appropriated matching funds. She remarked that if a large vessel were to come into the boat harbor it would be very dangerous. She supported increased school maintenance funding for the replacement of the Homer high school roof. She thanked the committee for its support of \$250,000 for the Pratt Museum roof.

[2:32:05 PM](#)

CRAIG AMBROSIANI, SEWARD COUNTY COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER, SEWARD (via teleconference), relayed that the center was federally qualified medical clinic that served and it did not turn anyone away. The center provided transportation services, primary care, and limited behavioral health services for local schools, veterans. The center saw a little over 2,000 patients per year. He supported funding to build a new facility about 18,000 square feet.

[2:36:23 PM](#)

CAROLINE STORM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE COALITION FOR EDUCATION EQUITY, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), requested a significant increase in funding for major maintenance projects. She had applied for funding through Senator

Murkowski's office to get funds to fix the school. She remarked that the state was failing students by asking kids to go to school in buildings that could collapse.

[2:39:13 PM](#)

KIRK ROSE, CEO, ANCHORAGE COMMUNITY AND LAND TRUST, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), asked for support for a commercial kitchen incubator. He spoke to the importance of food security.

[2:42:25 PM](#)

CHRIS REITAN, SUPERINTENDENT, CRAIG CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT, CRAIG (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for school major maintenance funding. He thanked the committee for its time and consideration.

[2:44:13 PM](#)

LISA PARADY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALASKA COUNCIL OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, JUNEAU (via teleconference), thanked the committee for the opportunity to testify. She identified school major maintenance as an issue impacting students' safety.

[2:47:19 PM](#)

ERIC GURLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ACCESS ALASKA INC., ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), stated that the mission was to encourage and promote Alaskans to live in the community of their choice. He felt that the issue did not correspond with the lack of transportation, and that seniors were living in isolation and were becoming more homebound, and should allow others to help seniors get to their medical appointments. He urged funding for senior services. The set aside allowing for the federal match had not occurred.

Representative Josephson thanked Mr. Gurley for his work and efforts.

[2:50:28 PM](#)

TOM ATKINSON, CEO, KOTZEBUE ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION, KOTZEBUE (via teleconference), supported additional funds for the Renewable Energy Fund to replace the current megawatt, which was slated to get part of the original \$5 million,

but unfortunately the amount had been reduced to \$3 million; therefore, the association would not get the funding.

[2:53:07 PM](#)

KURT BUCHHOLZ, BOARD MEMBER, BLOOD BANK OF ALASKA, SOLDOTNA (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding to enable the Blood Bank of Alaska to do testing in state. Currently, blood was sent out of state, which could be delayed by weather and other. It would greatly improve the ability to provide blood quickly. He appreciated the opportunity to testify.

Representative Hannan referred to the mention of \$2 million. She observed it was in the Senate budget at \$1.75 million. She asked if the project could still move forward if the full \$2 million was not funded.

Mr. Buchholz answered that the full project was \$4 million and close to completion.

[2:57:01 PM](#)

PETER HAEUSSLER, SELF, WRANGELL (via teleconference), noted he was currently in Wrangell and lived in Chugiak. He advocated for funding for a warming chalet at the rink in Anchorage. He requested support to help build the chalet.

Representative Galvin thanked Mr. Haeussler for his work.

ART GEUSS, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), supported funding for the skating chalet, and was trying to make Anchorage a better place to live and work. He thanked the committee.

[3:03:44 PM](#)

TIM POTTER, ANCHORAGE SKATES, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for a skating park and warming chalet in midtown Anchorage. He spoke in support of a safe and stable park. He stressed there needed the ability to access a bathroom. He provided an example about a kid needing a restroom.

Co-Chair Edgmon thanked Mr. Potter for his testimony.

Co-Chair Edgmon CLOSED public testimony.

HB 269 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

CSSB 187(FIN) am was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Edgmon reviewed the schedule for the following day.

#

ADJOURNMENT

[3:09:40 PM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 3:09 p.m.