

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 12, 2024

3:04 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Mike Prax, Chair  
Representative Justin Ruffridge, Vice Chair  
Representative CJ McCormick  
Representative Dan Saddler  
Representative Jesse Sumner  
Representative Zack Fields  
Representative Genevieve Mina

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CONFIRMATION HEARINGS(S) :

Board of Optometry

Bradley Cross - Soldotna

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

HOUSE BILL NO. 275

"An Act relating to sexual assault examination kits; establishing the sexual assault examination kit tracking system; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 298

"An Act relating to the posting of warning signs for alcoholic beverages."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 275

SHORT TITLE: SEXUAL ASSAULT EXAMINATION KITS/TRACKING

SPONSOR(S): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/18/24 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
 01/18/24 (H) HSS, FIN  
 01/30/24 (H) HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106  
 01/30/24 (H) Heard & Held  
 01/30/24 (H) MINUTE(HSS)  
 02/22/24 (H) HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106  
 02/22/24 (H) <Bill Hearing Rescheduled to 02/24/24>  
 02/24/24 (H) HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106  
 02/24/24 (H) Heard & Held  
 02/24/24 (H) MINUTE(HSS)  
 03/12/24 (H) HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 298

SHORT TITLE: ALCOHOL WARNING SIGNS ON LIC. PREMISES  
 SPONSOR(S): GRAY

01/29/24 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
 01/29/24 (H) HSS, L&C  
 01/31/24 (H) SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED  
 01/31/24 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
 01/31/24 (H) HSS, L&C  
 03/12/24 (H) HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

BRADLEY CROSS, OD, Appointee  
 Board of Optometry  
 Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as appointee to the Board of Optometry.

DAMIEN DELZER, OD  
 President-Elect  
 Alaska Optometric Association  
 Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the appointment of Bradley Cross to the Board of Optometry.

PAMELA CONRAD, OD, representing self  
 Bethel, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of the appointment of Bradley Cross to the Board of Optometry.

LISA PURINTON, Legislative Liaison  
 Department of Public Safety  
 Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 275 on behalf of the sponsor, House Rules by request of the governor.

REPRESENTATIVE ANDREW GRAY  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, introduced SSHB 298 to the committee.

DAVID SONG, Staff  
Representative Andrew Gray  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Gray, prime sponsor, gave a sectional analysis and presentation on SSHB 298.

JOAN WILSON, Director  
Alcohol & Marijuana Control Office  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered committee questions on SSHB 298.

JANICE SHEUFELT, MD, Family Medicine Doctor  
Bartlett Regional Hospital  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony on SSHB 298.

MADELEINE GRANT, MD, Internal Medicine  
Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony on SSHB 298.

THOMAS GREMILLION, Director of Food Policy  
Consumer Federation of America  
Washington, District of Columbia

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony on SSHB 298.

TIM NAIMI, MD, MPH, Director  
Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research  
University of Victoria  
Brookline, Massachusetts

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave invited testimony on SSHB 298.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:04:25 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX called the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:04 P.M. Representatives McCormick, Saddler, Fields, Mina, and Prax were present at the call to order. Representatives Ruffridge and Sumner arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**CONFIRMATION HEARINGS(S) :**  
**Board of Optometry**

[3:06:04 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX announced that the first order of business would be a confirmation hearing on the governor's appointee to the Board of Optometry.

[3:06:24 PM](#)

BRADLEY CROSS, OD, Appointee, Board of Optometry, explained his qualifications to hold a second term on the Board of Optometry.

[3:07:23 PM](#)

DR. CROSS, in response to questions from committee members, said that during his time on the board he has helped streamline the licensing process, helped pass more specific regulations to optometry, and started delivering more annual reports to various divisions within the state. He noted that he receives exceptional support from the DCCED. He clarified that "streamlining" is in reference to the process by which optometrists become certified to practice in Alaska.

[3:12:09 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE spoke to the character of Dr. Cross and said he has put a lot of work into making optometry more streamlined and efficient for all involved.

[3:13:05 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX opened public testimony on Bradley Cross's appointment to the Board of Optometry.

[3:13:27 PM](#)

DAMIEN DELZER, OD, President-Elect, Alaska Optometric Association, spoke in support of the appointment of Dr. Cross to the Board of Optometry. He spoke to the character of Dr. Cross,

citing his role in passing regulations related to optometry, his dedication toward improving the profession, and his experience in the field of optometry.

[3:14:33 PM](#)

PAMELA CONRAD, OD, representing self, testified in support of the appointment of Dr. Cross to the Board of Optometry. She spoke to the character of Dr. Cross and emphasized the instrumental role his work has played in streamlining the process of becoming an optometrist in Alaska.

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CHAIR PRAX, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony.

[3:16:13 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCORMICK shared that Pamela Conrad is his mother.

[3:17:07 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX stated that the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointees and recommends that the following names be forwarded to a joint session for consideration: Bradley Cross, Board of Optometry. He said that signing the report regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects an individual member's approval or disapproval of the appointee, and the nomination is merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[3:17:28 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:17 p.m. to 3:19 p.m.

**HB 275-SEXUAL ASSAULT EXAMINATION KITS/TRACKING**

[3:19:43 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 275 "An Act relating to sexual assault examination kits; establishing the sexual assault examination kit tracking system; and providing for an effective date."

[3:20:16 PM](#)

LISA PURINTON, Legislative Liaison, Department of Public Safety, presented HB 275 on behalf of the sponsor, House Rules by request of the governor. She explained that HB 275 would require the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to maintain a sex assault examination kit tracking system to allow victims to log in online and track the location of their sex assault exam kit at any point in time in the process of the examination by the Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory ("Crime Lab").

[3:22:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked if there is anything that would prohibit DPS from utilizing the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of a sexual assault victim for purposes outside of investigation.

MS. PURINTON answered that once the kit is processed, the DNA information is entered in the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) for secure data storage, and it is against the rules of CODIS to enroll the DNA in any sort of database beside CODIS.

[3:24:16 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE announced he would offer neither Amendment 1 nor Amendment 2 [both in the committee packet].

[3:24:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE moved to adopt Amendment 3 to HB 275, labeled 33-GH2317\A.3, C. Radford, 2/22/24, which read as follows:

Page 2, line 3:  
Delete "30"  
Insert "20 [30]"

CHAIR PRAX objected for the purpose of discussion.

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE explained Amendment 3, saying it would allow statutes to continue the downward pressure on the turnaround time for a sexual examination kit.

[3:26:33 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX asked Ms. Purinton how the Crime Lab would prioritize certain examination kits over others.

[3:27:46 PM](#)

MS. PURINTON explained that she doesn't know if there is a priority on how examination kits are handled and said she would follow up with information later.

[3:28:53 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX removed his objection. There being no further objection, Amendment 3 to HB 275 was adopted.

[3:29:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE moved to adopt Amendment 4 to HB 275, labeled 33-GH2317\A.4, C. Radford, 2/22/24, which read as follows:

Page 2, line 20:  
Delete "six months"  
Insert "120 days"

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE explained that Amendment 4 would decrease the timeframe from 6 months to 120 days or 4 months.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked Representative Ruffridge if he had confidence that 120 days would be achievable.

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE offered his understanding from previous public testimony that the timeframe of 90 days is far too short and 6 months is too long, so 120 days was chosen as a good in between.

CHAIR PRAX removed his objection. There being no further objection, Amendment 4 to HB 275 was adopted.

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CHAIR PRAX announced that HB 275, [as amended], was held over.

**HB 298-ALCOHOL WARNING SIGNS ON LIC. PREMISES**

[3:32:49 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX announced that the final order of business would be SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 298, "An Act relating to the posting of warning signs for alcoholic beverages."

[3:33:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ANDREW GRAY, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, introduced SSHB 298 to the committee. He said that "this bill would make Alaskans aware that alcohol can cause cancer." He explained that there has been broad scientific consensus for decades that Alcohol is a class 1 carcinogen, yet most of the public is not aware of that reality. He said that the goal of HB 298 is to empower Alaskans to make informed decisions about the products they consume.

[3:36:13 PM](#)

DAVID SONG, Staff, Representative Andrew Gray, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Gray, prime sponsor, gave a sectional analysis and presentation on SSHB 298. He began with the sectional analysis [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 1: Amends AS 04.21.065(b) to require that vendors of alcohol replace their sign that reads:

"WARNING: Drinking alcoholic beverages such as beer, wine, wine coolers, and distilled spirits or smoking cigarettes during pregnancy can cause birth defects."

with a new sign that reads:

"WARNING: Alcohol use during pregnancy can cause birth defects. Alcohol use can cause cancer, including breast and colon cancers.

[3:37:04 PM](#)

MR. SONG moved to the associated presentation of SSHB 298 [included in committee packet], and began on slide one, which explained medical facts surrounding alcohol consumption and use. He continued to slide 2, which displayed a graph of new cancer cases in 2020 that were attributable to alcohol consumption. He continued to slide 3, which explained the "information gap" that the American public has with regards to alcohol's effects on human health and correlation with cancer. He showed slides 4 and 5, which elaborated on what SSHB 298 would do and how it would change signage in establishments selling alcohol. He moved to slide 6, which gave examples of warning labels on alcohol from different countries. Mr. Song concluded the presentation on slide 7, which highlighted the zero fiscal note obtained by the Department of Commerce, Community & Economic

Development (DCCED) and further emphasized that making the public aware of the health issues associated with alcohol would improve the well-being of Alaskans.

[3:41:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked if vendors would have to obtain new signs themselves or if they would be obtained from the state.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY deferred the question to Joan Wilson.

[3:42:07 PM](#)

JOAN WILSON, Director, Alcohol & Marijuana Control Office, responded that the state would provide the sign.

[3:42:54 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked why certain language is being taken out of SSHB 298.

MR. SONG said that it was mainly to streamline the bill and added that he would consider it a friendly amendment to reintroduce the struck language.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked how SSHB 298 could address fetal alcohol syndrome and cancer awareness.

[3:44:09 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY pointed to the signage proposed under SSHB 298, which displays a pregnant woman drinking as admonishable.

[3:44:52 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER asked about the science surrounding the proposed legislation.

[3:46:15 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY answered that the science is settled and pointed to the four invited testifiers who specialize in alcohol and cancer research.

[3:47:22 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER questioned the findings of the cited study and opined that results can be manipulated in a meta-analysis.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY cited the American Cancer Society's findings that alcohol unequivocally causes cancer.

[3:49:07 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked if people should be allowed to take part in something that they know is bad for them.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY said yes, they should be.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked how much obligation the state has to inform the people of the risks of these activities.

[3:50:50 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY cited the zero fiscal note obtained from DCCED as evidence that SSHB 298 would not put any new burden on the state.

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REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE asked the legislature would point a public health campaign at vices and further questioned why it should choose alcohol if it won't legislate against other cancer risks.

[3:53:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY responded that when alcohol passes through the liver, it turns into acedoaldehyde, which damages DNA. He also advised that alcohol's cancer risk is unknown.

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JANICE SHEUFELT, MD, Family Medicine Doctor, Bartlett Regional Hospital, gave invited testimony on SSHB 298. She said there is no debate in the medical community about alcohol increasing the risk of cancer, and she gave her own anecdotal experience as a Medical Doctor seeing alcohol cause cancer and other serious health complications.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked if cigarettes or alcohol pose more of a public health threat.

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DR. SHEUFELT answered that every pregnant woman knows she shouldn't drink or smoke and emphasized that any way the public can learn about the inherent risks of any vice is a win for public health in Alaska.

[4:01:35 PM](#)

MADELEINE GRANT, MD, Internal Medicine, Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center, gave invited testimony on SSHB 298. She said that cancer is the leading cause of death in Alaska and emphasized that passing SSHB 298 would give the public agency in its choices and let people make informed decisions.

[4:03:58 PM](#)

THOMAS GREMILLION, Director of Food Policy, Consumer Federation of America, gave invited testimony on SSHB 298. He underlined the importance of warning labels on alcohol and shared that his own awareness of the risks of alcohol consumption was brought about by warning labels. He stressed the low level of public awareness that alcohol is a carcinogen. He added that signs at the point of sale are an effective way to reduce fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) and cancer risks.

[4:10:21 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER cited the Yukon Territory's point of sale warning signs that were associated with significantly reduced sales and asked if there was an associated lower rate of cancer. He further questioned whether alcohol had health benefits as stated by studies he had read in the past.

[4:11:20 PM](#)

MR. GREMILLION responded that the Yukon Territory's study led to a 6 percent drop in sales and said it would be difficult to demonstrate a lower rate of cancer with that 6 percent drop in sales.

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER clarified his question and asked if it is harmful to make a blanket statement that all alcohol poses a cancer risk.

[4:13:07 PM](#)

MR. GREMILLION said that the evidence for red wine's benefits is "thin as a sheet of paper." He added that there are studies that are purported to show important cardiovascular benefits associated with alcohol consumption but there is a consensus among doctors that any alcohol consumption is associated with an increased cancer risk.

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REPRESENTATIVE MCCORMICK asked Representative Sumner to cite his sources.

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER cited Google as his source.

[4:16:53 PM](#)

TIM NAIMI, MD, MPH, Director, Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, University of Victoria, gave invited testimony on SSHB 298. He said this issue is not a controversy in the medical world; alcohol has been diagnosed as a class 1 carcinogen for nearly four decades. He explained how alcohol got that designation and said that SSHB 298 would educate the public to make a more informed choice.

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REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked Joan Wilson how many signs a small business owner might have to account for.

[4:21:48 PM](#)

MS. WILSON offered her understanding that it would be about three signs for a business.

[4:22:21 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked if it could be logistically feasible to use this bill to reduce the number of signs required at businesses.

MS. WILSON answered that she is cautious to give direct support of a bill; however, she offered her understanding that SSHB 298 would streamline things for businesses.

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CHAIR PRAX, in consideration that the focus of the bill may divert attention from more likely causes of cancer, asked about the context of alcohol's cancer risk versus other health risks like sugar consumption.

[4:24:16 PM](#)

DR. NAIMI offered his understanding that alcohol causes as many years of life lost as cigarettes and asked if Chair Prax was looking for an exact quantification of the risks of alcohol versus other substances.

CHAIR PRAX clarified his concern that the legislature might be diverting its attention from more dire considerations.

DR. NAIMI said that alcohol was the leading cause of death in Alaska and called it a "modifiable" cause of death, one that could be reduced or eliminated with policy decisions.

[4:27:02 PM](#)

MR. GREMILLION briefly spoke up about the awareness of the associated health risks of alcohol that the proposed labels would create for the public.

[4:27:56 PM](#)

DR. SHEUFELT gave his thoughts on the comparison between sugar and alcohol's cancer risk and said that alcohol is a known carcinogen while sugar is not.

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REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked where the legislature could best direct its efforts to lower public health risk while not simultaneously raising costs.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY emphasized that under SSHB 298, current signage would be changed to increase awareness about the inherent risks of alcohol consumption.

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REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked if the testifiers had any thoughts on the rising cancer rates in America.

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DR. NAIMI explained that rates of alcohol consumption have been increasing since the mid-1990s, and the number of alcohol-attributable cancers has risen with that increased consumption.

[4:32:56 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCORMICK thanked the bill sponsor and commented that the cancer component of alcohol is a small facet of tackling the issues that the substance presents. He expressed frustration about the "slippery slope fallacy" that could drive policy indecision.

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REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER responded to Representative McCormick's comment about the "slippery slope fallacy" and explained where his mode of thought towards the issues presented by SSHB 298 come from.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY thanked the committee and invited testifiers and commented on the history of substance industries lobbying to prop up false health campaigns surrounding their vices. He said that SSHB 298 would result in a loss of sales of alcohol and added that it is the public's right to understand the risks of their vices.

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REPRESENTATIVE MINA thanked the bill sponsor and opined that SSHB 298 would be a good move for Alaska.

CHAIR PRAX announced that SSHB 298 was held over.

[4:40:30 PM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 4:40 p.m.