

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

March 21, 2024

3:05 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

HOUSE BILL NO. 309

"An Act relating to the practice of optometry; and relating to the delegation of routine services of optometry."

- HEARD & HELD

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

State Medical Board

David Paulson- Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 298

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

- MOVED CSSSHB 298(HSS) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 15

Designating May 2024 as Mental Health Awareness Month; and designating May 5 - 11, 2024, as Tardive Dyskinesia Awareness Week.

- MOVED HCR 15 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 9

Recognizing the need for parity in the provision of mental health and substance use disorder medical assistance benefits in the state; and urging the Department of Health to adopt regulations that ensure parity in the provision of mental health and substance use disorder medical assistance benefits in the state.

- MOVED HCR 9 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 187

"An Act relating to utilization review entities; exempting certain health care providers from making preauthorization requests for certain services; and providing for an effective date."

- BILL HEARING CANCELED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 309

SHORT TITLE: DELEGATION OF ROUTINE OPTOMETRY SERVICES

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) RUFFRIDGE

02/07/24	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/07/24	(H)	HSS, L&C
03/21/24	(H)	HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106

BILL: HB 298

SHORT TITLE: ALCOHOL WARNING SIGNS ON LIC. PREMISES

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(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
03/12/24	(H)	Heard & Held
03/12/24	(H)	MINUTE (HSS)
03/21/24	(H)	HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106

BILL: HCR 15

SHORT TITLE: MENTAL HEALTH MONTH; TARDIVE DYSK WEEK

SPONSOR(S): HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

03/13/24 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/13/24 (H) HSS
03/21/24 (H) HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106

BILL: HCR 9

02/15/24 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/15/24 (H) HSS
03/01/24 (H) COSPONSOR(S): ARMSTRONG
03/18/24 (H) COSPONSOR(S): HIMSCHOOT
03/19/24 (H) HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106
03/19/24 (H) Moved HCR 9 Out of Committee
03/21/24 (H) HSS AT 3:00 PM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

JAMES SEXTON, Staff
Representative Justin Ruffridge
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Representative Ruffridge, prime sponsor, gave a sectional analysis and a presentation on HB 309.

DAMIEN DELZER, O.D., President-Elect
Alaska Optometric Association
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony on HB 309.

ELIZABETH STEVENS, Executive Director
Alaska Optometric Association
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support HB 309.

KATHLEEN RICE, representing self
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 309.

BRADLEY CROSS, Optometrist
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave testimony on HB 309.

DAVID PAULSON, M.D., Appointee
State Medical Board
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as appointee to the Alaska State Medical Board.

REPRESENTATIVE ANDREW GRAY

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, offered comment during the heading on SSHB 298.

SHAWN VAIMO, M.D., Board Member

Alaska Academy of Family Physicians

Girdwood, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SSHB 298.

TIFFANY HALL, Executive Director

Recover Alaska

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SSHB 298.

NOELLE LOCONTE, representing self

Madison, Wisconsin

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SSHB 298.

JOYCE SONG, representing self

Durham, North Carolina

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SSHB 298.

JOAN WILSON, Director

Alcohol and Marijuana Control Office

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered a question from Representative Fields.

RILEY NYE, Staff

Representative Mike Prax

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of the sponsor, the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee, of which Representative Prax serves as chair, introduced HCR 15.

ANN RINGSTAD, Executive Director

National Alliance on Mental Illness Alaska

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HCR 15.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:05:15 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX called the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:05 p.m. Representatives McCormick, Saddler, Sumner, Fields, Mina, Ruffridge, and Chair Prax were present at the call to order.

HB 309-DELEGATION OF ROUTINE OPTOMETRY SERVICES

[3:08:05 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 309 "An Act relating to the practice of optometry; and relating to the delegation of routine services of optometry."

[3:08:51 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE, as prime sponsor, introduced HB 309, saying that passage of HB 309 would remedy the exclusion of optometrists in the state, and that it would bring the request to the Board of Optometrists.

[3:10:21 PM](#)

JAMES SEXTON, Staff, Representative Justin Ruffridge, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Ruffridge, prime sponsor, gave a PowerPoint presentation on HB 309 [hardcopy included in the committee packet]. He began on slide one of his presentation, explaining that optometric practices do not have current statute language defining their authority. He compared other healthcare professions in Alaska that do have statutory definitions of their authority and gave examples of the tasks and medical duties of an optometrist. He said the current challenges faced by optometrists are rising patient load, absence of assistance, and financial burden. He explained the impacts of HB 309, saying there is great support for this bill and what the goal of the bill would be.

MR. SEXTON gave a sectional analysis on HB 309 [included in committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided, with some spelling corrections]:

Section 1

(7) authorizes an optometrist licensed under the chapter to delegate routine services and ensures regulations must (A) require that an agent not

licensed under the chapter must meet standards established by the Board.

(B) prohibits an optometrist from delegating duties related to pain management and [opioid] use and addiction

(C) Defines the phrase "routine services of optometry".

Section 2

(a) and (b) refers to section 1 services that are delegated by the Optometry Board.

Section 3

Allows for the practice of routine services of optometry as delegated by the Board established in Section 1.

[3:15:21 PM](#)

DAMIEN DELZER, O.D. President-Elect, Alaska Optometric Association, He explained that HB 309 is legislation requested by the Board of Optometry, saying that it addresses many issues raised by the board. He said that while many states recognize optometry as a medical authority, Alaska does not. He said that assistance improves access to nearly all types of medical care. He said that HB 309 would help to decrease patient cost and improve access. He gave examples of what optometrists do besides eye care and explained that HB 309 would allow for specific language to create regulation on optometry.

[3:19:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER asked what routine services are in an optometrist's office.

DR. DELZER said the assessment of vision, taking a photograph of the eyes for interpretation, performing scans for the interpretation of the doctor, and performance of vision tests, are some of the duties performed by a technician or assistant.

[3:20:26 PM](#)

ELIZABETH STEVENS, Executive Director, Alaska Optometric Association, explained what the bill would do to ease workload in optometrists' offices. She stated the association's strong support of HB 309.

[3:21:35 PM](#)

KATHLEEN RICE, representing self, voiced her support for HB 309. She said that Alaska optometrists have had a long-time authority to delegate tasks to technicians and assistants, and that this bill would allow an optometrist to delegate tasks to a technician or assistant. She said it would update statute to match what optometrists across Alaska are already doing. She said it would relieve optometrists of many duties that may take away from their work as optometrists.

[3:24:49 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked Representative Ruffridge what the clean-up of statute would look like.

[3:25:13 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE said there is none that he is aware of, and that he would have to look into it. He said that is not something he looked at in preparation for this bill.

[3:25:52 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX opened public testimony. After ascertaining that there was no one who wished to testify, he closed public testimony.

[3:26:36 PM](#)

BRADLEY CROSS, Optometrist, said that optometry is responsible for primary eye care in Alaska. He said that optometry has shown itself to be safe, sustainable, and economically beneficial. He said that HB 309 would correct the current statute to allow optometrists to delegate tasks to technicians and assistants, as they are allowed to in other places of the country. He said that as Alaska's population ages, optometrists will be more important than ever, and that this bill would help solve that problem.

[3:30:54 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX announced that HB 309 was held over.

[3:31:21 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:31 p.m. to 3:33. p.m.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

State Medical Board

[3:33:36 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX announced the next order of business would be the confirmation hearing on the governor's appointee to the State Medical Board.

[3:34:06 PM](#)

DAVID PAULSON, M.D., Appointee, State Medical Board, explained his history in the medical field and medical politics, as well as explained his focus as a board appointee.

[3:34:50 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA said that there isn't much geographic diversity on the state medical board and asked how Dr. Paulson would address rural issues with the whole board being from Anchorage.

DR. PAULSON said he doesn't specifically have a solution for it, but it should be brought up in a board meeting to bring more attention to the issue.

[3:36:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS mentioned Dr. Paulson's history with anti-masking during the COVID-19 Pandemic and his history taking different sides on medical issues.

DR. PAULSON answered that he isn't an anti-masker, that his opinions aren't contrary to those of the medical community.

[3:36:54 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX asked if Dr. Paulson came across anything during his time on the board that is of particular interest.

DR. PAULSON said that there are some areas in virtual care and telemedicine and Artificial Intelligence (AI) that need to be addressed.

[3:38:12 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX opened public testimony on the confirmation hearing. After ascertaining that there was no one in the room who wished to testify, he closed public testimony.

[3:38:45 PM](#)

DR. PAULSON, in response to committee questions, indicated he would send additional biographical information to Representative Saddler and responded to Representative Fields that he had not been the one to redact information from [his resume].

[3:41:19 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:41 p.m. to 3:43 p.m.

HB 298-ALCOHOL WARNING SIGNS ON LIC. PREMISES

[3:43:05 PM](#)

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

[3:43:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ANDREW GRAY, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor of SSHB 298, said that the purpose of this bill was for the public to be more informed of the risks of what they are consuming.

[3:44:44 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX opened public testimony on SSHB 298.

[3:45:24 PM](#)

SHAWN VAIMO, MD, Self/Board Member, Alaska Academy of Family Physicians, Testified on behalf of himself and the academy board in support of SSHB 298. He reiterated Representative Gray's point that the majority of the public does not know that Alcohol is a carcinogen. He said that this bill is important to make the public aware.

[3:46:23 PM](#)

DR. VAIMO, in response to a question from Representative Saddler as to which other substances beside tobacco could be considered for warning labels, listed per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), among other carcinogenic substances.

[3:48:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER emphasized his question.

[3:49:02 PM](#)

TIFFANY HALL, Executive Director, Recover Alaska, gave her full support for SSHB 298, explaining that alcohol is the deadliest drug in Alaska, and that it is a medical fact that alcohol causes cancer. She said knowledge is power, and public awareness is critical. She said that alcohol is addictive, and people know more about other risks of alcohol besides cancer. She emphasized the need for a long-term medical campaign from the state. She said any reduction in consumption will lower rates of harms of alcohol.

[3:51:58 PM](#)

NOELLE LOCONTE, representing self, gave her endorsement of SSHB 298. She said that it is uncontested in the medical community that alcohol causes cancer. She said that only 30 percent of the public knows that alcohol causes cancer, compared to 60 percent for UV light and 80 percent for tobacco. She expressed hope that this bill would reduce consumption. She gave examples of what types of cancer alcohol could cause.

[3:54:19 PM](#)

JOYCE SONG, representing self, testified in support of SSHB 298. She emphasized the connection between alcohol use and cancer.

[3:55:40 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX, after ascertaining there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on SSHB 298.

[3:55:50 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER asked if Representative Gray could provide animal studies that find that ethanol alcohol causes cancer.

[3:56:38 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY said that his staff would provide the committee with any studies needed.

[3:56:57 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:56 p.m. to 3:59. p.m.

[3:59:47 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA moved to adopt Amendment 1 to SSHB 298, labeled 33-LS1074\S.1, C. Radford, 3/19/24, which read as follows:

Page 1, line 9, following "defects":
Insert ", including fetal alcohol spectrum disorder"

CHAIR PRAX objected for the purpose of discussion.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA explained that the amendment would add five words to the bill, and how it would bring awareness of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). She said that this bill would add five words to the proposed sign change at alcohol sale stores. She said that FASD is an important issue for the state to address, and that the warning label proposed by the amendment would make a good change.

[4:02:31 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE said that he generally supports Amendment 1 but worries about cluttering up the new proposed sign. He mentioned that the current sign is "very easy to ignore."

[4:03:43 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked if there would still be a net word reduction from the current sign if Amendment 1 were adopted.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA said that she would do the math on the spot.

[4:04:33 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCORMICK asked for input from the bill sponsor.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY offered his understanding that with Amendment 1, the word count would remain the same. He said he feels neutral about the word increase, as the original goal of the bill was to make the new signs more noticeable with fewer words.

[4:05:46 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER opined that brevity is more effective in communicating the dangers of FASD.

[4:06:34 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS deferred his question to Ms. Wilson and asked if the sign displayed could include a picture.

[4:06:59 PM](#)

JOAN WILSON, Director, Alcohol & Marijuana Control Office, answered a question from Representative Fields. She said that she believes there is the flexibility to put a sign with pictures up.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS said that he sees an opportunity to communicate more clearly and thinks a simpler sign is better.

[4:07:47 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER said that he opposes Amendment 1 in the name of keeping the sign as concise as possible.

[4:08:20 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA echoed that Amendment 1 would result in a sign with the same number of words. Nevertheless, after listening to the discussion, she would be withdrawing Amendment 1. She added that a QR code idea is a good way to educate people on the effects of birth defects.

[4:09:27 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:09 p.m. to 4:09 p.m.

[4:09:53 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA withdrew Amendment 1.

[4:10:07 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS moved to adopt Amendment 2 to SSB 298, labeled 33-LS1074\S.2, C. Radford, 3/20/24, which read as follows:

Page 1, following line 2:

Insert a new bill section to read:

"* Section 1. AS 04.21.065(a) is amended to read:

(a) A holder of one of the following types of licenses or permits shall post on the licensed or designated premises two [THREE] separate warning signs as described in (b) of this section:

(1) brewery manufacturer license under AS 04.09.020 with a manufacturer sampling endorsement under AS 04.09.410;

(2) winery manufacturer license under AS 04.09.030 with a manufacturer sampling endorsement under AS 04.09.410;

(3) distillery manufacturer license under AS 04.09.040 with a manufacturer sampling endorsement under AS 04.09.410;

(4) beverage dispensary license under AS 04.09.200;

(5) restaurant or eating place license under AS 04.09.210;

(6) club license under AS 04.09.220;

(7) package store license under AS 04.09.230;

(8) pub license under AS 04.09.240;

(9) theater license under AS 04.09.250;

(10) common carrier dispensary license under AS 04.09.260;

(11) sporting activity or event license under AS 04.09.270;

(12) outdoor recreation lodge license under AS 04.09.280;

(13) fair license under AS 04.09.290;

(14) golf course license under AS 04.09.300;

(15) destination resort license under AS 04.09.310;

(16) brewery retail license under AS 04.09.320;

(17) winery retail license under AS 04.09.330;

(18) distillery retail license under AS 04.09.340;
(19) beverage dispensary tourism license under AS 04.09.350;
(20) seasonal restaurant or eating place tourism license under AS 04.09.360;
(21) beverage dispensary caterer's permit under AS 04.09.610;
(22) restaurant caterer's dining permit under AS 04.09.620;
(23) club caterer's permit under AS 04.09.630;
(24) art exhibit event permit under AS 04.09.640;
(25) music festival permit under AS 04.09.650;
(26) nonprofit organization event permit under AS 04.09.660;
(27) package store tasting event permit under AS 04.09.680;
(28) conditional contractor's permit under AS 04.09.710;
(29) another license or permit issued by the board authorizing consumption of alcoholic beverages."

Page 1, line 3:

Delete "**Section 1**"

Insert "**Sec. 2**"

Page 1, line 8:

Delete "OR SMOKING CIGARETTES]"

Insert "]" or smoking cigarettes"

Page 1, line 10, following "WARNING:"

Insert "**An unaccompanied person under 21 years of age who enters these premises in violation of law may, under AS 04.16.049(e), be civilly liable for damages of \$1,500.**"

Page 1, lines 12 - 15:

Delete "The third sign must read, "WARNING: An unaccompanied person under 21 years of age who enters these premises in violation of law may, under AS 04.16.049(e), be civilly liable for damages of \$1,500."

Insert "[THE THIRD SIGN MUST READ, "WARNING: AN UNACCOMPANIED PERSON UNDER 21 YEARS OF AGE WHO ENTERS THESE PREMISES IN VIOLATION OF LAW MAY, UNDER AS 04.16.049(e), BE CIVILLY LIABLE FOR DAMAGES OF \$1,500.]"

Page 1, line 15:

Delete "and second signs"

Insert "sign [AND SECOND SIGNS]"

Page 2, line 1:

Delete "them"

Insert "it [THEM]"

Page 2, line 3:

Delete "third"

Insert "second [THIRD]"

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER objected for the purpose of discussion.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS said that Amendment 2 presents an opportunity to communicate more clearly with small businesses and make the application of this bill easier. He explained that the amendment decreases the number of signs that must be displayed inside an establishment from three to two. He said if Amendment 2 is adopted, it would delegate the design of the new sign to the Department of Commerce. He said he believes that there could be a consolidation of information to one sign inside the establishment for brevity.

[4:12:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER questioned the purpose of the individual citations in Amendment 2.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS responded that it questions existing statutory language and is only proposing a change in the number of signs from three to two.

[4:13:18 PM](#)

MS. WILSON said that is accurate, the only thing being changed are certain lines and displaying two signs instead of three.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER cited Alaska Statute, explaining a perceived conflict.

MS. WILSON said to talk to someone who knows more and explained her thoughts on the Statute. She said that the section being referred to doesn't require that a sign display all statutory references for all related entities.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said that Amendment 2 does not have specific language related to beverage dispensary licenses.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked if leg legal was online, as he thought that the questions were to do with a rewrite of a current title under Alaska statute. He emphasized Amendment 2 would not change existing statute.

[4:15:09 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:15 p.m. to 4:15 p.m.

[4:15:39 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said that he would need to look at section laws instead. He asked if this is a lot of language to put on a sign.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS said he is not changing the language around minors entering a serving establishment, rather the amendment is adding information about health risks surrounding alcohol consumption inside the establishment.

[4:16:34 PM](#)

MS. WILSON said that Amendment 2 is meant to take two 11x17-inch signs and combine them into one sign. She said it would be a good way to reduce clutter inside the businesses.

[4:17:19 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER clarified his earlier remarks and said he stands corrected.

[4:17:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE asked Representative Fields if the intention of Amendment 2 was to add back in language relating to the risks of cigarettes.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS said he doesn't have a position on that, and that the goal of the amendment was consolidation.

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE asked for clarification on page 2, line 23 of Amendment 2, saying it aims to reintroduce the cigarette language to warning signs in establishments.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked Representative Gray for clarification.

[4:18:51 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY said that it was obsolete language because smoking is no longer allowed indoors.

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE asked if the committee could eliminate certain lines in a conceptual amendment to Amendment 2.

[4:19:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER moved to adopt Conceptual Amendment 1 to Amendment 2 to strike lines 23-26 [as numbered in Amendment 2]. There being no objection, Conceptual Amendment 1 to Amendment 2 was adopted.

[4:20:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked if Representative Fields could walk through the differences between the current and proposed signs.

[4:20:55 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS said that it is based on consultation with Ms. Wilson.

[4:21:11 PM](#)

MS. WILSON explained the differences between the current sign and the proposed one, mainly the age warning and the restaurant warning sign.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked if the language would include the information that says a minor cannot be in an establishment nor furnish alcohol to a minor.

MS. WILSON said the sign outside should warn the minor, and the sign inside should warn of furnishing alcohol to a minor.

[4:22:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER explained his understanding of Amendment 2 [as amended] is that it is combining language warning minors of being on the establishment's premises with the language that no one may furnish alcohol to a minor.

[4:23:17 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS said he believes that is correct.

REPRESENTATIVE SUMNER clarified he said that because he saw certain language on a different line.

[4:23:52 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE said, "The scary sign outside will be a lot scarier with a lot more words and a lot more dollars."

REPRESENTATIVE MINA said she supports Amendment 2 [as conceptually amended]. She gave a comment that the removal of the cigarette language on the sign is appropriate in the context of the bill, but she worries because tobacco use is on the rise.

[4:25:12 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked for clarification on a motion.

[4:25:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER withdrew his objection to Amendment 2, as conceptually amended. There being no further objection, Amendment 2, as conceptually amended, was adopted.

[4:26:35 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:26 p.m. to 4:27. p.m.

[4:28:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE moved to report SSHB 298, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSSSHB 298(HSS) was reported out of the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee.

[4:28:42 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:28 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

HCR 15-MENTAL HEALTH MONTH; TARDIVE DYSK WEEK

[4:31:57 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 15, Designating May 2024 as Mental Health Awareness Month; and designating May 5 - 11, 2024, as Tardive Dyskinesia Awareness Week.

[4:32:23 PM](#)

RILEY NYE, Staff, Representative Mike Prax, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of the sponsor, the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee, on which Representative Prax serves as chair, explained that HCR 15 would shine a light on mental health awareness. He noted that a large portion of Alaskans have a mental health condition. He explained that HCR 15 would designate may as mental Health awareness month, and this would allow for mental health to become a priority in Alaska.

[4:34:12 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX opened public testimony on HCR 15.

[4:35:33 PM](#)

ANN RINGSTAD, Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness Alaska, Testified in support of HCR 15. She said that NAMI's mission is to eliminate stigma with mental illness, and complimented Mr. Nye's analysis. She said that more than half of the people in the United States Affected by Mental health issues didn't seek out treatment. She said anyone is susceptible to mental health issues, and that NAMI provides this resolution to increase awareness and treatment of mental health issues. She said this resolution is important for mental health awareness.

[4:38:00 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX asked about the statistics of anti-psychotic drugs.

MS. RINGSTAD said there are many physiological effects of medication, and that many under prescription don't seek out help.

CHAIR PRAX asked if there are alternative treatments to medication.

MS. RINGSTAD said she is not a physician, but recommended people go to a provider to discuss alternative treatments.

[4:39:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked if there is an understanding for the cause of the high rate of serious mental illness in Alaska.

MS. RINGSTAD responded, "Who knows?" She said that all anyone can do is focus on awareness and direct resources towards treatment of those affected.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER noted that there are several different observance months and weeks, and he asked how making May mental health awareness month would impact mental health awareness and treatment.

MS. RINGSTAD answered that it would give legislators an opportunity to bring the issue to light.

[4:42:02 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX, after ascertaining there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HCR 15.

The committee took an at-ease from 4:42 p.m. to 4:43. p.m.

[4:43:01 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE moved to report HCR 15 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HCR 15 was reported out of the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee.

[4:43:44 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:43 p.m. to 4:45 p.m.

MENTAL HEALTH/SUBSTANCE ASSISTANCE PARITY

[4:46:01 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 9, Recognizing the need for parity in the provision of mental health and substance use disorder medical assistance benefits in the state; and urging the Department of Health to adopt regulations that ensure parity in the provision of mental health and substance use disorder medical assistance benefits in the state.

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE moved to adopt and attach Fiscal Note LEG-SESSOMB Component #0 to HCR 9, [which was previously reported out of committee on 3/19/24 without the fiscal note]. There being no objection, the fiscal note was adopted and attached to HCR 9 and reported out of the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee.

[4:47:26 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 4:47 p.m.