

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS

March 21, 2023

1:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Stanley Wright, Chair
Representative Laddie Shaw
Representative Ben Carpenter
Representative George Rauscher
Representative Cliff Groh
Representative Andrew Gray

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Dan Saddler

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): OVERVIEW OF THE ALASKA MILITARY YOUTH ACADEMY PROGRAM

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 25

"An Act relating to eligibility for the permanent fund dividend; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 25

SHORT TITLE: PFD ELIGIBILITY UNIFORMED SERVICES

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) STORY

01/19/23	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/23
01/19/23	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/19/23	(H)	STA, MLV, FIN
01/31/23	(H)	STA AT 3:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
01/31/23	(H)	Heard & Held
01/31/23	(H)	MINUTE(STA)
02/16/23	(H)	STA AT 3:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
02/16/23	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
02/21/23	(H)	STA AT 3:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
02/21/23	(H)	Moved CSHB 25(STA) Out of Committee

02/21/23	(H)	MINUTE (STA)
02/22/23	(H)	STA RPT CS (STA) NEW TITLE 5DP 1NR
02/22/23	(H)	DP: ARMSTRONG, ALLARD, STORY, CARPENTER, SHAW
02/22/23	(H)	NR: C.JOHNSON
03/09/23	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/09/23	(H)	Heard & Held
03/09/23	(H)	MINUTE (MLV)
03/14/23	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/14/23	(H)	Heard & Held
03/14/23	(H)	MINUTE (MLV)
03/16/23	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120
03/16/23	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
03/21/23	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

DAVID MCPHETRES, Director
Alaska Military Youth Academy
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Alaska Military Youth Academy Program.

JOSH BOWEN, Budget Officer
Alaska Military Youth Academy
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Alaska Military Youth Academy Program.

EMILY NAUMAN, Deputy Director
Legislative Legal Services
Legislative Affairs Agency
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Offered invited testimony during the hearing on CSHB 25 (STA).

REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Offered brief remarks during the hearing on CSHB 25 (STA), as the prime sponsor.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:00:33 PM](#)

CHAIR STANLEY WRIGHT called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Representatives Shaw, Gray, Rauscher, and Wright were present at the call to order. Representatives Carpenter and Groh arrived as the meeting was in progress.

Presentation(s): Overview of the Alaska Military Youth Academy Program

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CHAIR WRIGHT announced that the first order of business would be the Overview of the Alaska Military Youth Academy presentation.

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DAVID MCPHETRES, Director, Alaska Military Youth Academy (AMYA), Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, directed attention to a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Overview Alaska Military Youth Academy," dated 3/21/23 [included in the committee packet]. He began his presentation with an overview of the AMYA mission statement on slide 2, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Help meet the life coping skills and educational needs of 16-18 year old Alaskans who are at risk of not completing their secondary education, and to provide them with the values, skills, education and self-discipline to succeed as adults.

A 17 ½ month residential and non-residential quasi-military educational program for young men and women who have not received a high school credential.

Operates as a non-combatant entity under the National Guard with oversight by the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) (Reserve Integration) (OASD) (RA).

MR. MCPHETRES stressed that AMYA was not a replacement for a juvenile detention center or an intensive therapy organization. He provided anecdotal information about what kind of experiences cadets have at AMYA and explained the two-week acclimation period for new cadets that introduces them to the military style rules there. He further explained AMYA was quasi-military, meaning the students are not enlisted upon joining the program

nor required to enlist later, rather the military structure is used as a [behavior management] tool. He indicated that the acclimation period was used to see whether a prospective cadet will succeed and that 80 percent of cadets that start the program graduate. After this period is when they start on the academic curriculum. He provided a brief overview of the academic process as well as other vocational and skill-based training the cadets are exposed to. He highlighted the success of AMYA through a photo on slide 2 of a recent top graduate who is now a U.S. Airmen. He returned to reference more general overview information from slide 2, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Return on Investment of \$2.66 for every dollar expended on the program

There are 40 Challenge sites in 31 States, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia that serve ~10,000 teens per year

Largest Mentoring program in the State of Alaska - opportunity for uniformed personnel to be mentors

6,480 Graduates from AMYA since 1994

2561 GEDs and 422 HS Diplomas since 2005

MR. MCPHETRES added that AMYA receives funding from both the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and the State of Alaska.

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JOSH BOWEN, Budget Officer, Alaska Military Youth Academy, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, explained the budget and funding sources for AMYA in further detail on slide 3, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Cooperative Agreement - Between the National Guard Bureau and State of Alaska

75% Federal Reimbursement and 25% State Match - Personal Services - Reimbursed up to assigned General Schedule (GS) Maximum for each position and for Allowable Benefits - Reimbursement for Authorized Cost or Activities Subject to Cooperative Agreement

General Funds - Personal Services - Salary for employees that go over GS Maximum and State of Alaska specific benefits - Provide for cost or activities not reimbursable or go over authorized cost limitations

SFY23 Annual Cost Per Cadet = \$46,879 - Cadets spend avg. of 4,380 hours per cycle with AMYA. (2 cycles a year) - \$46,879 divided by 4,380 hours = \$5.35 per hour per cadet

AMYA is a tuition free 24hr operation that provides clothing, bedding, hygiene supplies, school supplies, food, and activity costs

MR. BOWEN added that one limitation of reimbursement under the cooperative agreement was clothes and equipment. The current agreement allows for \$500 per cadet to be reimbursed federally, but AMYA averages about \$1,000 per cadet on clothing. He contributed this to the logistics of living in Alaska, including the extreme winter weather and cost of shipping.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked whether the cadets were allowed to fund any of their equipment or clothing on their own.

MR. MCPHETRES replied that cadets can provide some items on their own, but due to AMYA serving students from all socio-economic backgrounds past attempts to implement shopping lists have become cost prohibitive to the cadets and resulted in uniformity issues within the clothes themselves. He reiterated that AMYA was not allowed to charge cadets for clothing.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER posed a hypothetical scenario in which a cadet wanted to purchase additional equipment beyond what AMYA provided, and whether he/she could do so.

MR. MCPHETRES explained that AMYA standardizes the clothing and equipment they issue and answered that no, cadets are not currently able to pay for these items themselves.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY referred to information [on slide 2] that described the program as having residential and non-residential options, and asked how residency decisions are made.

MR. MCPHETRES replied that all cadets do a combination of both. The program starts with a 22-week residency that includes the 2-week acclimation period. For the year after cadets graduate from the residential phase, AMYA is federally mandated to continue following their progress and providing assistance non-residentially, he explained.

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MR. MCPHETRES continued the presentation with data about graduated cadets. He reported that about 10 percent join the military immediately and an additional 10 percent will join by the time they turn 18. He briefly referenced two graduates and their stories, which were on slide 4.

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MR. MCPHETRES continued with graduate anecdotes on slide 5 and shared the stories of Lena Allen, who is now pursuing a master's in law and went into law enforcement, and Lindsey Sorenson, who was a culinary arts graduate and has served on board for the Alaska Fur Rendezvous.

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MR. MCPHETRES moved on to speak about the eight core components of the AMYA program. He started with pictures on slide 6 that showcased the physical fitness training all cadets go through. He stated that an average class of cadets will lose a collective 2000 pounds by graduation. However, he stressed that this was all healthy weight loss attributed to active daily routines and if a cadet comes in below body mass index (BMI) recommendations, AMYA works to increase the cadet's BMI.

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MR. MCPHETRES proceeded to slide 7 and spoke about the next of the core components: academic excellence. He indicated that AMYA's main academic goal is that its cadets earn their high school diploma or General Education Diploma (GED). Currently 65-70 percent of cadets graduate AMYA with a diploma or GED.

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MR. MCPHETRES acknowledged the importance of job skills and Alaska's need for people to enter the trades. On slide 8, he explained the programs AMYA offers in partnerships with state

unions and union shops that provide direct training and eventually apprenticeships to the cadets. There is also onsite culinary arts and logistics training available, as well as resume development and job interview training. He asserted these programs provide the cadets with skills they can take into their adult lives.

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CHAIR WRIGHT sought specifics on how AMYA works with the Alaska Vocational Technical Center (AVTEC).

MR. MCPHETRES explained that AMYA has an extensive partnership with AVTEC, which presents at AMYA every program cycle. He expressed that his biggest concerns with cadets in post-residency is when they return home. He described the backgrounds of some cadets as having "life experiences I wouldn't wish on any one of us." He shared the gratifying feeling of watching cadets overcome those challenges and suggested that their partnership with AVTEC and other vocational programs plays a large role in the cadet's success. The next core component of the program is learning how to be a responsible citizen, which he spoke about on slide 9. He shared that AMYA helps eligible cadets register to vote and take them to the polling place if an election occurs during their program. He emphasized that being a responsible citizen is how cadets can give back to their communities.

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MR. MCPHETRES proceeded to slide 10 to showcase the life coping skills the academy provides to cadets. He anecdotally shared that there have been higher levels of suicidal ideation, violence, and self-control behaviors in youth over the recent years. He reported that AMYA works to combat this by exposing cadets to new and difficult life experiences with the proper support that helps them build confidence and other positive coping skills. He emphasized that an important part of the campus promoting such skills is that when a cadet makes a mistake, they do so in a safe environment with immediate correction so they can learn from it and move forward.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked whether AMYA applicants exceed the available spots in the program.

MR. MCPHETRES replied that they do not. He said that they are working to get enrollment back to where it was pre-COVID. Currently the goal for [each] graduation is 125 cadets.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER questioned whether AMYA was turning applicants down even though there is availability.

MR. MCPHETRES explained that each cadet has to fit into DoD standards, which included not being a convicted felon, having the mental and physical capabilities to participate, and being within the age range. He noted that the only exception to these rules is that age waivers may be obtained for someone just below or above the age range.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY asked how the academy is advertised.

MR. MCPHETRES responded that AMYA advertises on the radio, goes to school counselors, and appears at community events to spread awareness of the program. Currently AMYA has been able to travel more to other parts of the state to do face-to-face visits.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY assumed that most cadets were coming from the Anchorage area and further questioned the existence of a fund to cover travel for cadets from other areas, specifically villages.

MR. MCPHETRES answered that travel is another expense that AMYA takes on. He added that 25-30 percent of cadets are from outside of Anchorage and about 20 percent are from off the road system.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER returned to the topic of vocational training programs in regard to the cadets that are from other areas, and he asked whether the job placements associated with these programs were going to be in the cadet's home community or located solely in the Anchorage area.

MR. MCPHETRES replied that cadets get placed in jobs within the communities to which they return. He explained that most graduates go back to their communities to continue their vocational training in local entities, such as the city jails, kitchens, and small auto repair shops. He emphasized that AMYA

maintains contact with its graduates from a distance for the following year.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked during which months [AMYA] operates.

MR. MCPHETRES explained that there are two educational cycles at AMYA. The first starts in January and graduates in June; the second starts in July and graduates in December. He reported that AMYA has changed its schedule from prior years to align with the school calendar, allowing cadets to return to school after the program at the start of a new semester.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER questioned how AMYA makes up for the time outside of the cadet's traditional school environment so that they can continue on to subsequent grades and meet educational [standards] when they return.

MR. MCPHETRES replied that during the 5.5 months at the academy, the cadets earn at least 7.5 credits that are transferrable to any high school in the state, and he has seen cadets earn as many as 12.5 credits in a single cycle. He noted some cadets enter the program with a credit deficiency that they can make up while at AMYA so they can be back on track and ready to learn when they reenter school.

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MR. MCPHETRES continued with his presentation on slide 11 to discuss AMYA's community service requirement. Each cadet completes at least 40 hours of service within the school's community, including litter pick-up and assisting at events such as races and parades. He indicated that their participation in such events also provides an opportunity to showcase the program and increase visibility.

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CHAIR WRIGHT sought a more detailed list of the community service opportunities the cadets take part in and what they do specifically.

MR. MCPHETRES provided more examples of community service events, including volunteering at the Thanksgiving blessing, veteran standdowns, and military and community events. He said some of that work includes loading cars with Thanksgiving groceries and helping set up and tear down event equipment. He

maintained that the cadets are known to be hard and efficient workers and that AMYA often gets so many requests from the community for cadet volunteers that it has to turn some down.

CHAIR WRIGHT wondered how many hours a group of cadets usually completes as a whole.

MR. MCPHETRES did not have a number for the entire cadre, but he offered that a single cadet can earn up to 80 hours of service during their five and half months.

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MR. MCPHETRES moved on to discuss health and hygiene, the next core component of the program, on slide 13. He revealed that many of the cadets have little exposure to health and hygiene skills or opportunities at home, such as dental and vision care, and can even be unaware of allergies or other life-threatening conditions they may have. He said AMYA has a partnership with the National Guard that provides full dental and vision checks, which he suggested is one component of building better awareness of health issues. He also said that AMYA helps set up insurance through Denali KidCare for uninsured cadets, which they can take with them after leaving the program. Cadets are additionally trained in proper self-care skills, which he stressed is a life basic but a vital part of the program.

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MR. MCPHETRES continued with slide 13 and the core component of leadership and followership. By week six the cadets run the program themselves, taking lead on directing daily routines. He mentioned the evolution of the cadets' leadership and followership skills, adding that many cadets thrive when given these positions. The cadets can progress through leadership ranks up to Corps Sergeant Major, which he reported is the highest cadet rank.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked whether the leadership program was rotational "so that everyone gets a shot at it" or if the cadet leaders are chosen based on who shows the most ambition.

MR. MCPHETRES confirmed that the leadership program is rotational so that every cadet gets a chance to try themselves out, but that cadets compete for higher level positions. He

emphasized that the Corps Sergeant Major does not rotate, rather it is an earned position.

[1:33:04 PM](#)

MR. MCPHETRES proceeded to speak about graduation preparation cadets go through, which was highlighted on slide 15. He shared that the focus of the academy is always "what's next" for the cadet and prior to graduation AMYA helps the cadets put together a post residential action plan. This includes short-, medium-, and long-term goals for their future; resume information; and other resources on which placement staff work with the cadets. He mentioned that AMYA verifies that 100 percent of its cadets have post program placements in a job, school, or military branch before graduation. Cadets are required to check in once a month for the year following graduation, and he reported that these often function as an opportunity for the cadets to ask for continued support. One of the post-residential resources they can access is the non-profit 501c(3) associated with AMYA. Cadets can apply for scholarships funded by this non-profit, and he reported that it has been a positive way to keep in contact. He relayed that an active-duty alumnus told him that the "academy changed my life." He detailed several other examples of former graduates, some active duty and other non-military, that are now using the skills and vocational training they learned at AMYA in their careers.

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MR. MCPHETRES wrapped up his presentation by inviting the committee members to this year's graduation on the June 15.

[1:38:24 PM](#)

CHAIR WRIGHT shared he was a judge for a cooking contest once for the program and thanked the presenters for the passion they have for the program.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER thanked the presenters for their work at AMYA and summarized a tour of the facility he had been on previously.

[1:39:22 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked whether demand for cadets is high or declining.

MR. MCPHETRES reported that cadet interest has been fairly flat. He attributed that to "being locked into our walls" [during the COVID-19 pandemic]. He emphasized the importance of face-to-face contact in successfully increasing interest in AMYA. He shared that he has experienced a communication gap between the community and the academy that AMYA has been actively working on repairing. He expressed that this is especially true when it comes to the public perception of AMYA, and he emphasized that it is not a place for "bad kids" but rather those that need a higher level of structure to thrive. He reported interest requests that are triple the number of applicants that start the program and reflected on the need to close that gap.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER asked whether applicant interest was only from within the state.

MR. MCPHETRES explained that there are 40 similar programs throughout the nation. These other academies have been seeing a boom in applicants. He reported that there are some cadets who do come in from out of state, but in order to do so, they must have an Alaska resident as a relative, who can act as their legal guardian.

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The committee took a brief at-ease.

HB 25-PFD ELIGIBILITY UNIFORMED SERVICES

[1:42:27 PM](#)

CHAIR WRIGHT announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 25 "An Act relating to eligibility for the permanent fund dividend; and providing for an effective date." [Before the committee was CSHB 25(STA).]

CHAIR WRIGHT informed committee members of a memorandum ("memo") from Legislative Legal Services addressing a question regarding the applicability of the permanent fund dividend (PFD) five-year rule.

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EMILY NAUMAN, Deputy Director, Legislative Legal Services, Legislative Affairs Agency, stated she was asked to come to the committee to discuss the five-year rule in relation to Alaska Statutes affected by CSHB 25(STA). She referred to the memo from Legislative Legal Services on this question [included in the committee packet], which stated that the part of Alaska Statutes that created the five-year rule, AS 43.23.008(d), also applies to members of the armed services. The rule states that after a resident is absent from [Alaska] for more than 180 days for five of the preceding years, then the Department of Revenue (DOR) assumes that the applicant is no longer a resident. She maintained that the rule applies even if the absence falls under the allowable absences under AS 43.23.008(a), which would include allowable absences for uniformed or armed forces service members if amended by CSHB 25(STA).

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REPRESENTATIVE ANDI STORY, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor of CSHB 25(STA), said she had no comments to offer at this time.

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REPRESENTATIVE GRAY sought to confirm that, as drafted, CSHB 25(STA) would not change who the five-year rule currently effects.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY shared her understanding that CSHB 25(STA) would not allow anyone to collect the PFD after five years and deferred to Ms. Nauman for further details.

MS. NAUMAN added two qualifications to Representative Gray's understanding. She explained that the five-year rule already exists in Alaska Statutes and CSHB 25(STA) does not change that part of the statute. Additionally, she reported that an applicant can rebuff the presumption that they are no longer qualified if they can demonstrate clear and convincing evidence to [DOR] that they have been present in the state for 30 cumulative days within the five years and they remain a resident as defined in Alaska Statutes.

REPRESENTATIVE GRAY asked whether an individual could fulfill the requirement by "taking a six-day vacation" to Alaska every year.

MS. NAUMAN confirmed Representative Gray's understanding is correct.

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REPRESENTATIVE SHAW expressed his support for the proposed changes to CSHB 25(STA), as chair of the House State Affairs Committee. He reported that the changes still align with the intent of the committee substitute (CS) that was reported from HSTA while removing additional financial burden on DOR.

[HB 25 was held over.]

[1:50:59 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 1:50 p.m.