

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS**

April 26, 2023

3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative CJ McCormick, Chair
Representative Sarah Vance
Representative Jamie Allard
Representative Maxine Dibert
Representative Jennie Armstrong

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Ben Carpenter
Representative Josiah Patkotak

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): ALASKA LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION COMMUNITY
JUSTICE WORKER PROGRAM

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

NIKOLE NELSON, President
Alaska Legal Services Corporation
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave the Alaska Legal Services Corporation
Community Justice Worker Program presentation.

JOE NELSON, Chair
Alaska Legal Services Corporation
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony during the Alaska
Legal Services Corporation Community Justice Worker Program
presentation.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:08 PM](#)

CHAIR CJ MCCORMICK called the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Representatives Vance, Allard, Armstrong, and McCormick were present at the call to order. Representative Dibert arrived as the meeting was in progress.

The committee took an at-ease from 3:31 p.m. to 3:32 p.m.

PRESENTATION(S): Alaska Legal Services Corporation Community Justice Worker Program

[3:34:30 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK announced that the only order of business would be the Alaska Legal Services Corporation Community Justice Worker Program presentation.

[3:34:56 PM](#)

NIKOLE NELSON, President, Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC), began the Alaska Legal Services Corporation Community Justice Worker Program presentation via PowerPoint [hardcopy included in the committee packet], on slide 2, which explained a brief history of the corporation and its mission to all Alaskans.

[3:37:30 PM](#)

MS. NELSON moved to slide 3, which further elaborated on ALSC's goal and expanse as a corporation in Alaska. She continued to slide 4, which displayed a map of Alaska depicting the location of each ALSC office aside a list of quick facts related to ALSC. She explained how ALSC is funded, how many staff it has as a whole, and its annual caseload as a corporation.

[3:43:49 PM](#)

MS. NELSON continued to describe ALSC's legal role and rights as a corporation by explaining that it is prohibited from taking up certain cases concerning federal regulation. She cited abortion and euthanasia issues as cases that ALSC would not be allowed to address and said ALSC can do only "bread and butter cases."

[3:46:26 PM](#)

MS. NELSON resumed the presentation on slide 5, which explained how ALSC is a cost-effective corporation that achieves positive

results in over 86 percent of the cases that it takes up. She moved to slide 6, which emphasized how the limited access to legal help for many people is a barrier for justice and explained how ALSC is working to relieve that barrier to justice.

[3:50:29 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ARMSTRONG asked how ALSC decides whether or not to take up a case.

MS. NELSON answered that priorities are set by each office for each community it is in, most often determined by what issue is the most pertinent for each community.

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REPRESENTATIVE ARMSTRONG asked how much money ALSC would need so as not to have to turn any cases away.

MS. NELSON answered that ALSC doesn't know the full amount needed for full funding and shared an estimate of \$100,000 per 182 people served as a metric to be used for a full funding estimate.

[3:53:13 PM](#)

MS. NELSON resumed the presentation on slide 7, which displayed an image of a crevasse in a glacier as a means to emphasize the growing gap in accessibility to justice for many Alaskans. She continued to slide 8, which displayed a graphic that visualized the convoluted legal landscape of the justice system in Alaska.

[3:56:50 PM](#)

MS. NELSON, in response to a series of questions from Representative Allard, confirmed that ALSC is a nonprofit organization. It has been funded by the state and received \$281,000 in the previous fiscal year. She said that ALSC raised \$7 million in the past fiscal year and does receive donations from Alaska Native corporations.

[4:02:40 PM](#)

MS. NELSON, in response to Representative Vance, confirmed that there is an attorney shortage. She said ALSC has attorneys on

staff, as well as volunteers, and she mentioned a community justice program.

[4:04:43 PM](#)

MS. NELSON resumed the presentation on slide 8, where she elaborated on the legal structures and services that are available to Alaskans. She continued to slide 9, which displayed four separate maps of Alaska that conveyed available medical providers, information service providers, legal providers, and social service providers in specific regions of Alaska. She moved to slide 10, which displayed a graphic that illustrated the pressures an individual could face on top of their already stressful legal problems as a means to emphasize the effect that a lack of access to legal services has on Alaskans. She continued to slide 11, which used a graph to highlight the overlap between access to legal services and good overall public health.

[4:09:18 PM](#)

MS. NELSON moved to slide 12, which explained how a locally sourced community justice workforce could benefit Alaskans. She continued to slide 13, which displayed a graph of law advocates in Alaska, their associated affiliations, and their type of practice as a means to highlight the current available legal services in Alaska. Slide 14 displayed a table that outlined the specific number of community justice workers by their associated practice area. She continued to slide 15, which explained the Alaska Bar Rule 43.5 Waiver and the role that it plays in allowing more Alaskans access to legal services.

[4:16:44 PM](#)

MS. NELSON concluded the presentation on slide 17, which displayed a series of images of legal services that are part of the community justice worker system.

[4:17:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DIBERT asked how attorneys and community justice workers are able to deliver their services to communities.

MS. NELSON answered that ALSC has offices statewide and most services are delivered by phone or broadband. She said that remote communities have limited access to legal services and

explained how the physical inaccessibility of those places limits access to legal services.

[4:20:54 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK invite Joe Nelson to speak.

[4:21:11 PM](#)

JOE NELSON, Board Chair, Alaska Legal Services Corporation, began his testimony by explaining his background in community legal services and his history of legal practice in Alaska. He said that the ALSC board is entirely volunteer and explained how Alaska's legal landscape is unique due to its culture, size, languages, and geographic challenges. He advised that Alaska needs to fundamentally change its system of legal services to allow for more free and fair access to justice.

[4:25:47 PM](#)

MS. NELSON proffered that part of the community justice plan is to develop a community justice resource center at hub locations around Alaska. She said that these resource centers would offer apprenticeships in community justice and said that the first two locations would be in Bethel and Kodiak.

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CHAIR MCCORMICK said that people struggle with legal issues in rural Alaska because of its inaccessibility. His expressed appreciation for the information given the committee.

[4:28:23 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 4:28 p.m.