

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
February 21, 2024
9:14 a.m.

9:14:58 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Stedman called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 9:14 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Lyman Hoffman, Co-Chair
Senator Donny Olson, Co-Chair
Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair
Senator Click Bishop
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Kelly Merrick
Senator David Wilson

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Pat Branson, Mayor, City of Kodiak; Delilah Walsh, City Manager, City of Ketchikan; Rodney Dial, Mayor, Ketchikan Gateway Borough; Scott Arndt, Mayor, Kodiak Island Borough; Lauree Morton, Deputy Director, Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault; Brenda Stanfill, Director, Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault; Beth Weldon, President, Alaska Municipal League; Lon Garrison, Executive Director, Alaska Association of School Boards; Joan O'Keefe, Executive Director, Southwest Alaska Independent Living; Blue Shibler, Executive Director, Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children; Nikki Love, Coordinator, Partnership for Family and Children; Nikki Bowers, Owner, Discovery Preschool; Eleanor Lynch, Self, Juneau; Paul Kelly, Self, Juneau; Terry Haines, Self, City of Kodiak.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Mason Villarma, Interim Borough Manager, City of Wrangell, Wrangell; Tina Russell, Director, Advocates for Victims of Violence, Valdez; Marianne Mills, President, Alaska Geriatric Exchange Network, Juneau; Erin Walker-Tolles, Member, Alaska Children's Alliance, Juneau; Peter Hoepfner, President of Board of Directors, Cordova Family Resources, Cordova; Chris Reitan, Superintendent, Craig City School District, Craig; Lisa DeLaet, Crisis Now Community Director, Ketchikan Wellness Coalition, Ketchikan; Melissa O'Bryan, Ketchikan Indian Community Housing Authority, Ketchikan; Jennifer Bryner, Nurse, Petersburg Medical Center, Petersburg; Natalie Wojcik, Executive Director, Sitkans Against Family Violence, Sitka; Rod Morrison, Superintendent, Southeast Island School District, Thorne Bay, Prince of Wales; Patricia Gilbert, Mayor, City of Wrangell; Kimberly Dolph, Kodiak Women's Crisis and Resource Center, Kodiak; Penny Lample, Shelter Coordinator, Kodiak Women's Resource Crisis Center, Kodiak; Rebecca Shields, Kodiak Women's Resource Crisis Center, Kodiak; Julie Vevnar, Self, Juneau.

SUMMARY

SB 186 APPROP: OPERATING BUDGET; CAP; SUPP; AM

SB 186 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 187 APPROP: CAP; REAPPROP

SB 187 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 188 APPROP: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET

SB 188 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY: JUNEAU, SITKA, CORDOVA, KETCHIKAN, PETERSBURG, WRANGELL, PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND, KODIAK, AND OFFNETS

#sb186

#sb187

#sb188

SENATE BILL NO. 186

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and loan program expenses of state government and for certain programs; capitalizing funds; amending appropriations; making capital appropriations; making supplemental appropriations; making reappropriations; making appropriations under art. IX, sec. 17(c), Constitution of the State of Alaska, from the constitutional budget reserve fund; and providing for an effective date."

SENATE BILL NO. 187

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

SENATE BILL NO. 188

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and capital expenses of the state's integrated comprehensive mental health program; and providing for an effective date."

[9:15:10 AM](#)

^PUBLIC TESTIMONY: JUNEAU, SITKA, CORDOVA, KETCHIKAN, PETERSBURG, WRANGELL, PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND, KODIAK, AND OFFNETS

[9:17:11 AM](#)

MASON VILLARMA, INTERIM BOROUGH MANAGER, CITY OF WRANGELL, WRANGELL (via teleconference), testified in support of the \$5 million supplemental appropriation for the Wrangell Dam Safety Upgrade Project. He remarked that his community had experienced a landslide, which underscored Wrangell's most critical public safety concerns, specifically the condition of its aging dams.

[9:19:40 AM](#)

TINA RUSSELL, DIRECTOR, ADVOCATES FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE, VALDEZ (via teleconference), spoke in support of the increase to the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA) budget in the Department of Public Safety (DPS). She stated that the Advocates for Victims of

Violence was the only organization in Valdez to provide support for victims and families affected by domestic violence and sexual assault. She stressed the need for funding within the budget to provide critical services.

[9:22:16 AM](#)

PAT BRANSON, MAYOR, CITY OF KODIAK, spoke in support of the funding for the replacement of St. Herman Harbor in Kodiak. She remarked that Kodiak was the largest fishing port in the state, so the marine infrastructure was a critical element to the community and state.

[9:25:14 AM](#)

DELILAH WALSH, CITY MANAGER, CITY OF KETCHIKAN, spoke in support of reinstating \$1.5 million for Crisis Now grants, and \$500,000 for crisis services grants. She stressed that the funding was necessary for services such as health programs to meet the needs of the community.

[9:27:31 AM](#)

RODNEY DIAL, MAYOR, KETCHIKAN GATEWAY BOROUGH, remarked that those living in the unorganized areas rely solely on the funding from the federal government, and noted that the unorganized areas were "held harmless" by the state. He felt that the organized areas needed to be inflation-proofed like the unorganized areas.

[9:29:44 AM](#)

SCOTT ARNDT, MAYOR, KODIAK ISLAND BOROUGH, echoed the testimony from the others from Kodiak. He also echoed the comments from Mayor Dial. He spoke in support of closing the income tax loophole from Hillcorp. He testified in support of funding for internet for schools, an increase to the Base Student Allocation, (BSA).

[9:31:23 AM](#)

AT EASE

[9:31:38 AM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Stedman handed the gavel to Senator Kiehl.

[9:31:47 AM](#)

LAUREE MORTON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, ALASKA NETWORK ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT, spoke in support of funding for services for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. She stressed that providing life-saving services for victims was necessary to protect citizens of the state.

[9:34:21 AM](#)

BRENDA STANFILL, DIRECTOR, ALASKA NETWORK ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT, echoed the comments from Ms. Morton.

[9:37:34 AM](#)

BETH WELDON, PRESIDENT, ALASKA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE, spoke in support of the \$30 million recapitalization of the community assistance fund. She also testified in support of funding for school construction and major maintenance. She spoke in support of funding for harbor matching grants. She testified in support of funding for matching grants for infrastructure grants from the federal government.

[9:40:30 AM](#)

LON GARRISON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALASKA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS, spoke in support of education funding. He stated that additional funding would support retention and recruitment of teachers, administrators, staff, student wellness, and safety. He spoke in support of an increase to the BSA of not less than \$1413.

[9:42:23 AM](#)

JOAN O'KEEFE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SOUTHWEST ALASKA INDEPENDENT LIVING, spoke in support of funding for senior benefits, and the recommendations from the Alaska Mental Health Trust. She spoke in support of matching grants for transit funding.

[9:44:54 AM](#)

BLUE SHIBLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALASKA ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN, testified in support of funding for funding for childcare and the education for young children.

[9:46:25 AM](#)

NIKKI LOVE, COORDINATOR, PARTNERSHIP FOR FAMILY AND CHILDREN, echoed the comments from Ms. Shibler.

[9:47:27 AM](#)

NIKKI BOWERS, OWNER, DISCOVERY PRESCHOOL, spoke in support of funding for childcare.

Senator Merrick wondered how many children were serviced by Discovery Preschool.

Ms. Bowers replied that there were forty one families.

[9:49:02 AM](#)

ELEANOR LYNCH, SELF, JUNEAU, spoke in support of funding for increase to wildlife firefighter pay.

[9:51:17 AM](#)

PAUL KELLY, SELF, JUNEAU, spoke in support of an increase of the BSA by \$1413.

[9:53:11 AM](#)

MARIANNE MILLS, PRESIDENT, ALASKA GERIATRIC EXCHANGE NETWORK, JUNEAU (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for senior services that support seniors to remain in their homes.

[9:57:00 AM](#)

ERIN WALKER-TOLLES, MEMBER, ALASKA CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE, JUNEAU (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for programs supporting victims of childhood sexual abuse.

[9:59:59 AM](#)

PETER HOEPFNER, PRESIDENT OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS, CORDOVA FAMILY RESOURCES, CORDOVA (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for Cordova Family Resources.

[10:03:20 AM](#)

TERRY HAINES, SELF, CITY OF KODIAK, echoed the comments from Mayor Branson.

[10:05:24 AM](#)

Senator Bishop validated the comments from Mr. Haines.

[10:05:45 AM](#)

AT EASE

[10:06:11 AM](#)

RECONVENED

Senator Kiehl handed the gavel to Co-Chair Stedman.

[10:06:28 AM](#)

CHRIS REITAN, SUPERINTENDENT, CRAIG CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT, CRAIG (via teleconference), testified in support of an increase to the BSA.

[10:08:33 AM](#)

LISA DELAET, CRISIS NOW COMMUNITY DIRECTOR, KETCHIKAN WELLNESS COALITION, KETCHIKAN (via teleconference), spoke in support of increased funding for crisis services programs.

[10:11:35 AM](#)

MELISSA O'BRYAN, KETCHIKAN INDIAN COMMUNITY HOUSING AUTHORITY, KETCHIKAN (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for the homeless assistance programs and other housing programs.

[10:13:33 AM](#)

JENNIFER BRYNER, NURSE, PETERSBURG MEDICAL CENTER, PETERSBURG (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for a replacement hospital building.

[10:15:51 AM](#)

NATALIE WOJCIK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SITKANS AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE, SITKA (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for an increase to the budget for the CDVSA.

[10:17:47 AM](#)

ROD MORRISON, SUPERINTENDENT, SOUTHEAST ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT, THORNE BAY, PRINCE OF WALES (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for an increase to the BSA.

[10:20:21 AM](#)

PATRICIA GILBERT, MAYOR, CITY OF WRANGELL (via teleconference), testified in support of \$5 million supplemental appropriation for the Wrangell Dam Safety Upgrade Project. He remarked that his community had experienced a landslide, which underscored Wrangell's most critical public safety concerns, specifically the condition of its aging dams.

[10:22:35 AM](#)

KIMBERLY DOLPH, KODIAK WOMEN'S CRISIS AND RESOURCE CENTER, KODIAK (via teleconference), spoke in support of increased funding for the CDVSA.

[10:23:57 AM](#)

PENNY LAMPLE, SHELTER COORDINATOR, KODIAK WOMEN'S RESOURCE CRISIS CENTER, KODIAK (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the CDVSA grants.

[10:25:13 AM](#)

REBECCA SHIELDS, KODIAK WOMEN'S RESOURCE CRISIS CENTER, KODIAK (via teleconference), spoke in support of increased funding for CDVSA grants.

[10:27:52 AM](#)

JULIE VEVNAR, SELF, JUNEAU (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for education.

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ADJOURNMENT

10:29:23 AM

The meeting was adjourned at 10:29 a.m.