

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
February 22, 2024  
1:07 p.m.

[1:07:34 PM](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Senator Merrick called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 1:07 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Donny Olson, Co-Chair  
Senator Jesse Kiehl  
Senator Kelly Merrick  
Senator David Wilson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Lyman Hoffman, Co-Chair  
Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair  
Senator Click Bishop

ALSO PRESENT

Rob Dumouchel, City Manager, City of Homer; Lisa Parker, Vice President, Alaska Municipal League; Bryan Hawkins, Port Director, City of Homer; Anna Brawley, Member, Anchorage Assembly; Storm P. Hansen, City Council Member, City of Homer; Glenda Ledford, Mayor, City of Wasilla; Crystal Nygard, Deputy Administrator, City of Wasilla; Stanley, Member, Youth Action Board Housing and Homelessness.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Mike Jones, Self, Homer; Cheri Smith, Executive Director, The LeeShore Center, Kenai; Stephanie Berglund, CEO, Thread, Anchorage; Bob Scanlon, CEO, Blood Bank of Alaska, Anchorage; Chris Mello, Board Member, Alaska Blood Bank, Anchorage; Colonel Julie Gration, Board Member, Alaska Blood Bank, Anchorage; Jen Griffis, Vice President Policy and Advocacy, Alaska Children's Trust, Anchorage; Harrison Deveer, Fire Fighter, Nikiski Fire Department, Nikiski; Sean Case, Former Board Member, Alaska Blood Bank, Anchorage; Peter Panarese, Self, Eagle River; Caroline Storm, Executive Director, Coalition for Education Equity,

Anchorage; Cindy Harris, Board Member, Alzheimer Association Alaska Chapter, Soldotna; Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director, Governor's Council on Disability and Special Education, Homer; Christine Pate, Legal Program Director, Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Sitka; Will Taygan, Self, Chugiak; Heidi Hill, Grants and Program Director, Abused Women's Aid in Crisis, Anchorage; Ashley Peltier, Mat-Su Health Foundation, Meadow Lakes; Mark Lackey, Alaska Head Start Association, Wasilla; Mariyam Medovaya, Alaska Long Trail Project Coordinator, Alaska Trails, Palmer; A.C. Ressler, Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau, Palmer; Howard Carbone, Owner, Alaska Nature Guides, Talkeetna; Noelle Carbone, Self, Talkeetna; Betsy Baker, Self, Anchorage; Christy Gomez, Self, Tyonek; Rachel Lord, Self, Homer; Keeley Olson, Standing Together Against Rape, Anchorage.

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 TESTIMONEY: ANCHORAGE, MATANUSKA VALLEY, HOMER, SEWARD, VALDEZ, and KENAI PENINSULA

#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."

[1:07:53 PM](#)

^PUBLIC TESTIMONEY: ANCHORAGE, MATANUSKA VALLEY, HOMER, SEWARD, VALDEZ, and KENAI PENINSULA

[1:08:52 PM](#)

ROB DUMOUCHEL, CITY MANAGER, CITY OF HOMER, spoke in support of funding for Homer harbor expansion. He explained that the city had set aside matching money. He stressed that the expansion of the harbor would enhance transportation and commerce.

[1:09:56 PM](#)

LISA PARKER, VICE PRESIDENT, ALASKA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE, spoke in support of an increase in funding for the base student allocation (BSA). She testified in support of funding for community jails.

[1:11:52 PM](#)

BRYAN HAWKINS, PORT DIRECTOR, CITY OF HOMER, echoed support of funding for the harbor expansion in Homer, of \$288,000. He also spoke in support of \$5 million funding for the municipal harbors matching grants program.

[1:14:11 PM](#)

ANNA BRAWLEY, MEMBER, ANCHORAGE ASSEMBLY, spoke in support of funding for communities, infrastructure, housing, public safety, and hope for the future. She stressed support of funding for municipalities.

[1:16:33 PM](#)

STORM P. HANSEN, CITY COUNCIL MEMBER, CITY OF HOMER, spoke in support of funding for the harbor expansion in Homer. She also spoke in support of an increase in funding for the BSA.

[1:17:45 PM](#)

MIKE JONES, SELF, HOMER (via teleconference), spoke against the reduction of the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD). He spoke against funding "special interest groups." He spoke against a defined benefit program.

[1:19:54 PM](#)

CHERI SMITH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE LEESHORE CENTER, KENAI (via teleconference), testified in support of adding \$4 million to the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA) budget.

[1:22:19 PM](#)

STEPHANIE BERGLUND, CEO, THREAD, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding \$35.5 million for childcare programs. She stressed that childcare was a critical infrastructure for the state.

[1:24:34 PM](#)

BOB SCANLON, CEO, BLOOD BANK OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Blood Bank of Alaska laboratory remaining needs to finish the establishment of the lab. He stressed that the funding would make it possible to keep blood bank testing in the state in perpetuity.

[1:27:07 PM](#)

CHRIS MELLO, BOARD MEMBER, ALASKA BLOOD BANK, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for

the Blood Bank of Alaska laboratory remaining needs to finish the establishment of the lab. He stressed that the funding would make it possible to keep blood bank testing in the state in perpetuity.

[1:29:08 PM](#)

COLONEL JULIE GRATION, BOARD MEMBER, ALASKA BLOOD BANK, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Blood Bank of Alaska laboratory remaining needs to finish the establishment of the lab. She explained the importance of donor testing.

[1:31:22 PM](#)

JEN GRIFFIS, VICE PRESIDENT POLICY AND ADVOCACY, ALASKA CHILDREN'S TRUST, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of increased funding for early childhood programs. She stressed the importance of policies for early education support.

[1:33:54 PM](#)

HARRISON DEVEER, FIRE FIGHTER, NIKISKI FIRE DEPARTMENT, NIKISKI (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for mobile health care. He stated that his local fire department had worked to provide onsite care in partnership with local hospitals and other community stakeholders.

[1:34:48 PM](#)

SEAN CASE, FORMER BOARD MEMBER, ALASKA BLOOD BANK, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of \$2 million for the Blood Bank of Alaska laboratory remaining needs to finish the establishment of the lab. He stressed that the funding would make it possible to keep blood bank testing in the state in perpetuity.

[1:36:28 PM](#)

PETER PANARESE, SELF, EAGLE RIVER (via teleconference), spoke in support of the Alaska Long Trail project. He testified that the trail would provide access to Chugiak State Park.

[1:37:15 PM](#)

CAROLINE STORM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COALITION FOR EDUCATION EQUITY, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for education, specifically schools with major maintenance issues. She noted that there were also schools that did not have working fire detectors. She remarked that the education funding needed to keep up with inflation. She asked that the education budget be increased by \$140 million.

[1:39:28 PM](#)

CINDY HARRIS, BOARD MEMBER, ALZHEIMER ASSOCIATION ALASKA CHAPTER, SOLDOTNA (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for senior benefits, specifically those in Alaska with dementia and their caregivers. She remarked that funding for grants would provide support by caregivers.

[1:40:16 PM](#)

PATRICK REINHART, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITY AND SPECIAL EDUCATION, HOMER (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Alaska Autism Resource Center and transit match funding.

[1:43:01 PM](#)

CHRISTINE PATE, LEGAL PROGRAM DIRECTOR, ALASKA NETWORK ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT, SITKA (via teleconference), testified in support of \$4 million to the CDVSA budget. She remarked that her staff was small in number, and also used volunteer attorneys.

[1:45:37 PM](#)

WILL TAYGAN, SELF, CHUGIAK (via teleconference), spoke in support of the Alaska Long Trail, specifically the trail between Eagle River and Chugiak. He shared the necessities related to the trail.

[1:46:46 PM](#)

HEIDI HILL, GRANTS AND PROGRAM DIRECTOR, ABUSED WOMEN'S AID IN CRISIS, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of restoring the \$4 million for the CDVSA budget. She remarked that there were major concerns about the large cut, which would result in a 20 percent cut in her shelter.

She specifically spoke about the legal advocates in the program.

[1:48:56 PM](#)

AT EASE

[1:50:13 PM](#)

RECONVENED

Senator Merrick handed the gavel to Senator Wilson.

[1:50:40 PM](#)

GLENDAL LEDFORD, MAYOR, CITY OF WASILLA, spoke in support of funding for education, housing, and public safety. She stressed the importance of economic drivers to attract families to move and stay in the state.

[1:51:50 PM](#)

CRYSTAL NYGARD, DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR, CITY OF WASILLA, testified in support of funding for education, housing, and public safety. She remarked that Wasilla had experienced recent population growth. She spoke in support of airport expansion and other economic growth responses. She felt that it was important to listen to small businesses to provide tools for success.

[1:55:53 PM](#)

STANLEY, MEMBER, YOUTH ACTION BOARD HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS, spoke in support of funding for Housing Alaskans Public Private Partnership. She spoke about the history of funding for housing, and the importance of living somewhere so people can thrive.

[1:55:55 PM](#)

ASHLEY PELTIER, MAT-SU HEALTH FOUNDATION, MEADOW LAKES (via teleconference), spoke against the proposed Crisis Now budget. She remarked that the proposed budget did not provide sufficient funds to support those in need of mental health assistance.

[1:58:02 PM](#)

MARK LACKEY, ALASKA HEAD START ASSOCIATION, WASILLA (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for early childhood education. He stressed that childcare businesses in the state were in crisis and were in desperate need of support and funding.

[2:00:53 PM](#)

MARIYAM MEDOVAYA, ALASKA LONG TRAIL PROJECT COORDINATOR, ALASKA TRAILS, PALMER (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for the Alaska Long Trail projects. She remarked that the trails were a large development project. She highlighted the various supporters of the trail.

[2:03:26 PM](#)

A.C. RESSLER, MAT-SU CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU, PALMER (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for the Alaska Long Trail projects, specifically the eight Mat-Su projects within the budget. He remarked that funding the infrastructure projects enhanced the communities.

[2:05:03 PM](#)

HOWARD CARBONE, OWNER, ALASKA NATURE GUIDES, TALKEETNA (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the Alaska Long Trail projects. He remarked that his business depended on tourism, so the long trail project would enhance his business. He stated that the current trails were so degraded that there were major safety concerns.

[2:07:30 PM](#)

NOELLE CARBONE, SELF, TALKEETNA (via teleconference), spoke in support of increased funding for education. She explained that she was a mother of a high school student, and remarked that her child was experiencing difficulty. She stated that her son was interested in engineering, but chose to go to college out of state. She felt that it was important for young people to stay in the state.

[2:09:11 PM](#)

BETSY BAKER, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for the Homeless Assistance Program to the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) and the special needs housing grant to AHFC. She stated that the

governor's amended budget had eliminated those items. She explained how those programs provided critical services.

[2:11:08 PM](#)

CHRISTY GOMEZ, SELF, TYONEK (via teleconference), testified in support of increased funding for education. She explained that the current funding levels were insufficient for the schools. She felt that additional funds could provide teacher support that could result in better equity in education with other communities in the state and country.

[2:13:11 PM](#)

RACHEL LORD, SELF, HOMER (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for education. She stressed that the constitution required funding for education. She spoke in support of funding for the harbor expansion in Homer. She spoke in support of using the money for state services, such as education, that may result in a lower PFD. She testified in support of funding for the food pantries.

KEELEY OLSON, STANDING TOGETHER AGAINST RAPE, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of additional \$4 million for the CDVSA. She remarked that the money was necessary for patient services. She stated that the amount was the same as what had been requested over the previous five years.

[2:17:32 PM](#)

AT EASE

[2:32:10 PM](#)

RECONVENED

[2:32:29 PM](#)

AT EASE

[2:45:58 PM](#)

RECONVENED

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ADJOURNMENT

2:46:32 PM

The meeting was adjourned at 2:46 p.m.