

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 28, 2023

3:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator David Wilson, Chair  
Senator James Kaufman, Vice Chair  
Senator Löki Tobin  
Senator Forrest Dunbar  
Senator Cathy Giessel

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH TRUST AUTHORITY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Anita Halterman - Eagle River  
Dr. John Morris - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATIONS ADVANCED

STATE MEDICAL BOARD

Dr. David Paulson - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

DR. JOHN MORRIS, Governor Appointee  
Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees  
Department of Revenue (DOR)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as a governor appointee to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees.

ANITA HALTERMAN, Governor Appointee

Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees  
Department of Revenue (DOR)  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified for reappointment to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees.

DR. DAVID PAULSON, Governor Appointee  
State Medical Board  
Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified as a governor appointee to the State Medical Board.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:30:55 PM](#)

**CHAIR DAVID WILSON** called the Senate Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Tobin, Kaufman, Giessel, Dunbar, and Chair Wilson.

#### **CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)**

#### **ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH TRUST AUTHORITY BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

[3:31:47 PM](#)

**CHAIR WILSON** announced the consideration of the confirmation of the governor appointee Dr. John Morris to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees.

[3:32:08 PM](#)

**DR. JOHN MORRIS**, Governor Appointee, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees, Department of Revenue (DOR), Anchorage, Alaska, stated he has lived in Alaska for seven years. He shared his personal background, education, and work experience. He said he had published research papers on cancer, blood management, and pain management in children. He has authored a chapter in a nationally recognized textbook on the conduct of anesthesia in patients with neuropsychiatric disease. He worked briefly as a financial analyst and then returned to the active practice of medicine. He purchased a 64-acre farm and learned aspects of land management such as property rights, environmental impacts, and working with corporations. He stated that he has experience working with trust beneficiaries as a doctor. He said he has experience with people close to him suffering from various mental illnesses and addictions. He opined that motivation would be his greatest asset to the position. Alaskans care for each other, and the Alaska Mental

Health Trust is uniquely Alaskan. Serving on the board would be a privilege.

[3:37:39 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN asked what dates he was employed by the Municipality of Anchorage.

DR. MORRIS replied his employment was from July 1, 2021 to mid-October 2021.

[3:38:04 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN asked whether the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) received money from the Mental Health Trust while he was employed by the municipality.

DR. MORRIS replied not that he was aware of. He shared that when he met with the CEO of the Mental Health Trust, he was told that the trust "did not do" homelessness.

[3:38:37 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN repeated the question and then cited [AS 44.25.210(c)(2)]. She read:

(c) A member of the board appointed by the governor under (b) of this section may not

(2) within the preceding two years or during the member's term of office have an interest in, served on the governing board of, or been employed by an organization that has received, during that same period, money from the mental health trust settlement income account under a grant or contract for services.

[3:39:24 PM](#)

DR. MORRIS responded that the sources MOA received funds from was beyond his scope of knowledge.

CHAIR TOBIN opined that the committee should follow up to ensure that MOA received no funds from the trust during Dr. Morris's tenure.

CHAIR WILSON suggested that the follow-up could take place in the Senate Finance Committee.

CHAIR WILSON asked Dr. Morris if had attended a Mental Health Trust Board meeting since he was appointed.

DR. MORRIS replied he was not aware of a meeting since he was appointed but he had reviewed the minutes from the January meeting. He added that he was unaware that he had a meeting with the Senate Finance Committee.

CHAIR WILSON clarified that there was a confirmation hearing tomorrow for a trustee. He didn't know if Dr. Morris was on the schedule but he would check.

[3:41:05 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN asked Dr. Morris if a panel identified under the statute she mentioned put his name forward.

[3:41:21 PM](#)

DR. MORRIS replied he did not know.

SENATOR TOBIN suggested the committee follow-up to ensure the appointment complies with the statute.

[3:41:47 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON advised that the confirmation hearing in the Senate Finance Committee was for someone other than Dr. Morris.

[3:42:16 PM](#)

At ease.

[3:43:17 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of the governor appointee Anita Halterman to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees.

[3:43:47 PM](#)

ANITA HALTERMAN, Governor Appointee, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees, Department of Revenue (DOR), Eagle River, Alaska, said she had been a public servant for most of her career. She stated that this would be a renewal of her current appointment, which began in 2019 as a fill-in for a member who stepped down. She said her employer asked her to seek appointments to boards and commissions for business interests to risk management solutions. After joining the board, she held several leadership roles and became Chair in January 2022. She observed that serving on the board has been an enlightening and powerful journey in expanding her knowledge of mental health needs, budgets, and programs offered in Alaska. She enjoys giving back to the community by helping to provide meaningful reform for mental health programs. She looks forward to continuing to work with the legislature. She stated that as a

child, she witnessed mental health issues firsthand. She said she was abused, put in foster care, joined the military after high school, met her husband, and came to Alaska. She stated she has a master's degree in business administration. She worked extensively for the Department of Health and Social Services and found it rewarding to improve programs and systems so they offer better services to program beneficiaries. Since beginning her work on the board, she no longer works for an information technology company but has worked for a media production company. She said she is familiar with budgeting and hopes to use her experience to help Alaska's programs. She desires to work with stakeholders to build innovative and comprehensive mental health programs for the Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiaries.

[3:51:26 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL expressed appreciation for Ms. Halterman's service.

[3:51:57 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked if any entity she has worked for in the last two years received any funding from the trust.

[3:52:33 PM](#)

MS. HALTERMAN replied no.

[3:53:10 PM](#)

At ease.

**CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)**  
**STATE MEDICAL BOARD**

[3:54:20 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of the governor appointee Dr. David Paulson to the State Medical Board.

[3:55:01 PM](#)

DR. DAVID PAULSON, Governor Appointee, State Medical Board, Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED), Anchorage, Alaska, stated he moved from Texas in 2017 to be a private practice neurosurgeon in Alaska. He described his educational background and said he would like to be on the board to embrace Alaska. He has three sons and he volunteers as a Boy Scout leader; now he would now like to serve on the State Medical Board as it is an area fit for him and it fulfills his desire to serve the community. He opined that having a varied background and good critical thinking skills will help him as a

board member to protect fellow Alaskans and the practice of medicine.

[3:58:51 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN noted that Dr. Paulson's application indicated that he was unwilling to disclose personal financial data. She asked if he would provide financial data and, if not, why.

DR. PAULSON replied he must have misread the question. He had no reason to object to full disclosure, and he was willing to addend his application.

SENATOR GIESSEL stated that financial disclosure is not relevant to the medical board.

CHAIR WILSON stated Dr. Paulson's answer was noted.

[4:00:42 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN recalled misinformation surrounding the pandemic. She asked Dr. Paulson if he had any reservations about sharing CDC information regarding the efficacy of vaccinations or any medically accurate information.

[4:01:34 PM](#)

DR. PAULSON replied that it would not be an issue.

[4:01:40 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON opened public testimony on the governor appointees; finding none, he closed public testimony.

[4:02:10 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON stated he researched the Alaska Mental Health Trust grants that are issued quarterly. He read the names of the grantees during Dr. Morris's time of employment with the Municipality of Anchorage. He found no grant history to the Municipality of Anchorage for that time period.

[4:04:10 PM](#)

SENATOR KAUFMAN stated that in accordance with AS 39.05.080, the Senate Health and Social Services Standing Committee reviewed the following and recommends the appointments be forwarded to a joint session for consideration:

ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH TRUST AUTHORITY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Anita Halterman - Eagle River

Dr. John Morris - Anchorage

STATE MEDICAL BOARD

Dr. David Paulson - Anchorage

Signing the reports regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects individual members' approval or disapproval of the appointees; the nominations are merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[4:04:34 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON found no objection and stated that the names would be forward.

[4:05:02 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Wilson adjourned the Senate Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting at 4:05 p.m.