

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

March 18, 2025

8:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Rebecca Himschoot, Co-Chair
Representative Donna Mears, Co-Chair
Representative Carolyn Hall
Representative Ky Holland
Representative Mike Prax
Representative Justin Ruffridge

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 58

"An Act relating to the office of public advocacy; and relating to the public advocate."

- MOVED HB 58 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 26

"An Act relating to the duties of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; and relating to a statewide public and community transit plan."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 50

"An Act relating to snow classics."

- MOVED HB 50 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 47

"An Act relating to crime and criminal procedure; relating to generated obscene child sexual abuse material; relating to the powers of district judges and magistrates; relating to teaching certificates; and relating to licensing of school bus drivers."

- BILL HEARING CANCELED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 58

SHORT TITLE: OPA: PUBLIC ADVOCATE APPOINTMENT

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) FIELDS

01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	CRA, STA
03/11/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/11/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/11/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/13/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/13/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/13/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/18/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

BILL: HB 26

SHORT TITLE: STATEWIDE PUBLIC & COMMUNITY TRANSIT PLAN

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) MINA

01/22/25	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	CRA, TRA
02/27/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
02/27/25	(H)	Heard & Held
02/27/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/18/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

BILL: HB 50

SHORT TITLE: SNOW CLASSICS

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) HANNAN

01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	CRA, L&C
03/11/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/11/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/11/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/13/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/13/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/13/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/18/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, gave final comment on HB 58.

REPRESENTATIVE GENEVIEVE MINA
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, gave an overview of HB 26.

GERRY HOPE, Government Relations Director
Sitka Tribe of Alaska
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 26.

KIM CHAMPNEY, Executive Director
Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 26.

MILLIE RYAN, President
Alaska Mobility Coalition
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 26.

PATRICK REINHART, Executive Director
Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 26.

MICHELE GIRAULT, Executive Director
Hope Community Resources;
Board President, Key Coalition
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 26.

BRIDGER REED-LEWIS, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 26.

HUNTER MEECHUM, Staff
Representative Sara Hannan
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave final comment on HB 50 on behalf of Representative Hannan, prime sponsor.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DONNA MEARS called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Representatives Hall, Holland, Himschoot, and Mears were present at the call to order. Representatives Prax and Ruffridge arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 58-OPA: PUBLIC ADVOCATE APPOINTMENT

[8:05:42 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 58, "An Act relating to the office of public advocacy; and relating to the public advocate."

[8:06:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, stated that HB 58 would make the appointment of the public advocate (PA) analogous to the appointment of the public defender (PD).

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND said he'd received a modest amount of input and much support on the efforts to harmonize the appointment processes.

[8:06:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HIMSCHOOT moved to report HB 58 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 58 was reported out of the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

[8:07:34 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:07 a.m. to 8:09 a.m.

HB 26-STATEWIDE PUBLIC & COMMUNITY TRANSIT PLAN

[8:09:50 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 26, "An Act relating to the duties of the

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; and relating to a statewide public and community transit plan."

[8:10:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GENEVIEVE MINA, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, gave a recap of HB 26. She said the bill seeks to modernize the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities' (DOT&PF) duties to reflect the needs of Alaskans by broadening their study of transportation options and improving their public engagement process to specifically focus on public transit. It would help the department be more multi-modal in their planning efforts.

[8:11:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND asked whether there had been further discussion about the Alaska Marine Highway System's (AMHS) infrastructure and its connection to the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE MINA reminded the committee that AMHS is in a different section of statute; nonetheless, she acknowledged its importance to the state. She deferred the question to Mr. Hope.

[8:12:52 AM](#)

GERRY HOPE, Government Relations Director, Sitka Tribe of Alaska, shared his understanding that AMHS is included, as the bill makes reference to state highways, vessels, docks, and floats, for example [in paragraph (7)], and "public, tribal, and community transit programs" [in paragraph (1)]. He said the bill would give tribal and public transit operators a seat at the table.

[8:15:51 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS opened public testimony on HB 26.

[8:16:29 AM](#)

KIM CHAMPNEY, Executive Director, Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities, testified in support of HB 26. She said the bill would enhance statewide transportation planning and provide an innovative transportation solution for people with disabilities to increase their independence and allow human service providers to focus on more complex needs. She added

that expanded independence would sustain the system with a more effective use of resources. She shared a personal anecdote.

[8:19:04 AM](#)

MILLIE RYAN, President, Alaska Mobility Coalition, testified in support for HB 26. She reminded the committee that driving is a privilege that's often taken for granted. She expressed excitement for the planning aspect of the bill, which would make better use of available resources, and advocated for the inclusion of community transportation and transit in the planning process.

[8:20:29 AM](#)

PATRICK REINHART, Executive Director, Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education, testified in support HB 26. He said many of the people he works with are dependent on others for rides, and the bill would prompt the state to consider different modes of transportation.

[8:21:32 AM](#)

MR. HOPE reiterated his support for the bill.

[8:22:02 AM](#)

MICHELE GIRAULT, Executive Director, Hope Community Resources; Board President, Key Coalition, testified in support of HB 26. She said access to transportation was named as one of the top three barriers for people with disabilities. She expressed support for anything that innovates transportation and expands access to jobs, community, friends, and family, and provides access to transportation as the population ages.

[8:22:58 AM](#)

BRIDGER REED-LEWIS, representing self, testified in support of HB 26. He shared that as someone with a disability, he is unable to drive and had to move to Anchorage for access to paratransit services. He advocated for the expansion of these services and spoke to the efficacy of the U-Pass program. He suggested amending the bill to offer two roundtrip rides to stores for those on food stamps and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

CO-CHAIR MEARS closed public testimony on HB 26.

[8:26:03 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS closed public testimony on HB 26 and announced that the bill was held over.

HB 50-SNOW CLASSICS

[8:26:38 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 50, "An Act relating to snow classics."

[8:27:06 AM](#)

HUNTER MEECHUM, Staff, Representative Sara Hannan, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Hannan, prime sponsor, said HB 50 broadens the definition of a "snow classic" to allow any qualified organization to host or administer the event.

[8:27:37 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS moved to report HB 50 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 50 was reported out of the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee.

[8:28:23 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 8:28 a.m.