

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
May 14, 2025
9:14 a.m.

9:14:40 AM

CALL TO ORDER

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

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Neal Foster, Co-Chair
Representative Andy Josephson, Co-Chair
Representative Calvin Schrage, Co-Chair
Representative Jamie Allard
Representative Jeremy Bynum
Representative Alyse Galvin
Representative Sara Hannan
Representative Nellie Unangiq Jimmie
Representative DeLena Johnson
Representative Will Stapp
Representative Frank Tomaszewski

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Kathleen Wedemeyer, Citizens Commission on Human Rights, Seattle; Ann Ringstad, Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness, Anchorage.

SUMMARY

HB 105 PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

HB 105 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 156 AK COMMERCIAL FISHING & AG BANK; LOANS

SB 156 was SCHEDULED but not HEARD.

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the meeting agenda.

#hb105

HOUSE BILL NO. 105

"An Act relating to mental health education."

9:16:12 AM

Representative Galvin provided a brief recap of HB 105. She explained that the bill represented a significant effort to address the mental health challenges facing youth in Alaska. She clarified that the bill did not impose a mandate on schools but instead created a tool that balanced mental health and physical health in schools by providing curriculum. She noted that the bill established a group of experts who understood the field and how to provide information in age-appropriate ways. She stated that the Alaska Board of Education would be responsible for creating clear guidelines to integrate mental health instruction effectively into classrooms. She added that school districts could choose to use and modify the guidelines to fit the particular district.

9:17:17 AM

Co-Chair Foster OPENED public testimony.

9:18:07 AM

KATHLEEN WEDEMEYER, CITIZENS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, SEATTLE (via teleconference), testified in opposition to the bill. She explained that she represented the Citizens Commission on Human Rights, which was a mental health and psychiatric "watchdog" group. She asserted that the current mental health system was based on a biomedical model and lacked the validity of any objective laboratory test for diagnosis. She asserted that the biomedical model of mental health was based on the concept that conditions were caused by neurobiological factors. She suggested that care often focused on diagnosis, medication, and symptom reduction rather than considering the full range of social and environmental factors that could affect mental health.

Ms. Wedemeyer continued that the commission's concern was that there would be a narrow focus on psychiatric or clinical data. She emphasized that many factors contributed

to mental health. Many medical conditions such as autoimmune disorders or diabetes were first diagnosed as psychiatric or mental health conditions. She warned that if such conditions were not treated correctly, the conditions could become serious. She urged the committee to consider the addition of a health care provider to the advisory board, such as a naturopath or a medical doctor who had experience in treating mental health without focusing solely on psychiatric drugs. She recommended adding a requirement that the training needed to include medical data to identify known medical and nutritional factors that could cause the type of distress that mimicked psychiatric disorders.

Co-Chair Foster relayed to the committee that there was a conflicting meeting at 9:30 a.m. and floor session was at 10:00 a.m., so the committee would be recessing at 9:30 a.m.

Representative Allard asked for clarification on who had testified and what organization she represented.

Co-Chair Foster replied that it was Ms. Kathleen Wedemeyer calling in from the Citizens Commission on Human Rights in Seattle.

[9:20:55 AM](#)

Representative Stapp remarked that he was not well-versed in the technical terminology and asked Ms. Wedemeyer to clarify the material difference between biomedical conditions and other conditions.

Ms. Wedemeyer responded that she would do her best to reply to the question, but she would be happy to provide the committee with more detailed informational materials after the meeting. She explained that there was a school of thought that believed that psychiatric conditions were caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain and that psychotropic drugs were one of the ways to address that imbalance. However, she noted that there were recent studies and data that invalidated the theory. She relayed that recent studies looked into other real-life factors that could alleviate mental health conditions. She stated that there were studies that showed that exercise could alleviate depression symptoms by as much as 30 percent. She

noted that exercise was frequently recommended as initial treatment for mental health issues.

Ms. Wedemeyer reiterated that her concern was that there would be a potential focus on psychiatric or clinical perspectives. She emphasized the need for consideration of other points of view and physical health data. She cautioned that many conditions had symptoms that mimicked psychiatric conditions, and if those were not diagnosed correctly and were instead treated with psychotropic drugs, the patient's situation could worsen. She argued that mental health education should include information to ensure that individuals and parents were aware of all possibilities.

Representative Galvin remarked that the bill did not address matters related to diagnoses. She suggested that Ms. Ann Ringstad clarify the situation.

[9:24:31 AM](#)

ANN RINGSTAD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), stated that the bill only established guidelines, which many schools across Alaska had requested. She noted that in 2021, the state conducted a study that captured information from 33 school districts regarding guidelines in place at the respective districts. She explained that every district reported having some guidelines, but the districts requested more resources and additional guidance to address specific challenges. She emphasized that the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) was not advocating for any specific curriculum, therapy, medication, or diagnosis by school staff. She stressed that the bill sought only to provide guidelines so that schools could understand how to support students and families.

Representative Stapp stated that his apprehensions about the bill stemmed from concerns regarding long-term effects of mental health diagnoses in childhood and how the diagnoses could impact adulthood. He relayed that when he joined the U.S. Army, he had a note in his school record from the fourth grade indicating that he had ADHD, which required him to undergo a three-hour psychological evaluation to determine if he was eligible to join the military. He shared that there was an incident in Fairbanks involving a young boy, Cody Ayer, who wanted to join the

military and was similarly affected by a prior ADHD diagnosis. He shared that the boy's life ended in tragedy a few years prior. He asked how the bill would balance providing access to mental health resources with preventing adverse impacts on students' futures.

Ms. Ringstad responded that the bill only established guidelines. She explained that supporting mental health required a collaborative approach involving the community, families, teachers, staff, administrators, and counselors to recognize potential concerns in individual students and worked collectively to provide support. She noted that the guidelines could potentially address record-keeping, although she did not know the legal specifics. She emphasized that the bill aimed to guide staff and school districts in addressing mental health thoughtfully and respectfully while also involving families.

Co-Chair Foster recognized Representative Allard and Representative Galvin for questions and reminded the committee that the meeting would recess at 9:30 a.m.

Representative Allard stated that her question might require more time and she was willing to withhold it until after the committee returned.

Co-Chair Foster stated that the meeting was recessing in case any open time became available for the committee to reconvene. He noted that he did not anticipate there being any time for the committee to reconvene. In all likelihood, the meeting would time out and the committee would return as scheduled at the 1:30 p.m. meeting. He would return to Representative Allard's question during the afternoon meeting. He noted that there were other testifiers online and he would keep public testimony open.

[9:29:43 AM](#)

RECESSED

[Note: the meeting never reconvened.]

HB 105 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#

ADJOURNMENT

9:29:48 AM

The meeting was adjourned at 9:29 p.m.