

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
May 14, 2025
2:23 p.m.

2:23:30 PM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Foster called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 2:23 p.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

ALSO PRESENT

Representative Alyse Galvin, Sponsor; Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke, Sponsor; Paul LaBolle, Staff, Representative Neal Foster; Senator Bill Wielechowski, Chair, Senate Rules Committee; David Dunsmore, Staff, Senator Bill Wielechowski.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Mike Coons, Self, Wasilla; Trevor Storrs, President and CEO, Alaska Children's Trust, Anchorage; Dr. Shirley Holloway, NAMI Alaska, Anchorage; Heather Heineken, Director of Finance and Support Services, Department of Education and Early Development; Melissa Patack, Motion Picture Association, Los Angeles, CA; David Johnson, Self,

Wasilla; Alex Koplin, Self, Homer; Carol Beecher, Director, Division of Elections, Office of the Lieutenant Governor.

SUMMARY

HB 105 PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

HB 105 was REPORTED out of committee with five "do pass" recommendations, one "do not pass" recommendation, and four "no recommendation" recommendations and with one new zero fiscal note from the Department of Health; one previously published fiscal impact note: FN1 (EED); and one previously published zero fiscal note: FN2 (DFC).

HB 174 REAA FUND: MT. EDGE CUMBE, TEACHER HOUSING

HB 174 was REPORTED out of committee with six "do pass" recommendations and three "no recommendation" recommendations and with one previously published fiscal impact note: FN1 (EED).

CSSB 64 (FIN) am
ELECTIONS

CSSB 64 (FIN) am was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 96 CHILDCARE: TAX CREDITS

SB 96 was REPORTED out of committee with three "do pass" recommendations, one "do not pass" recommendation, and five "amend" recommendations and with two previously published zero fiscal notes: FN1 (LWF) and FN3 (CED); and one previously published indeterminate fiscal note: FN2 (REV).

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the meeting agenda.

#sb96

SENATE BILL NO. 96

"An Act relating to education tax credits for certain payments and contributions for childcare and childcare facilities; relating to the insurance tax education

credit, the income tax education credit, the oil or gas producer education credit, the property tax education credit, the mining business education credit, the fisheries business education credit, and the fisheries resource landing tax education credit; providing for an effective date by amending the effective date of secs. 1, 2, and 21, ch. 61, SLA 2014; and providing for an effective date."

[2:24:27 PM](#)

AT EASE

[2:24:54 PM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Foster asked for a motion on the bill.

Co-Chair Schrage MOVED to REPORT SB 96 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

There being NO OBJECTION, it was so ordered.

SB 96 was REPORTED out of committee with three "do pass" recommendations, one "do not pass" recommendation, and five "amend" recommendations and with two previously published zero fiscal notes: FN1 (LWF) and FN3 (CED); and one previously published indeterminate fiscal note: FN2 (REV).

[2:25:49 PM](#)

#hb105

HOUSE BILL NO. 105

"An Act relating to mental health education."

[2:26:29 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ALYSE GALVIN, SPONSOR, reviewed the bill. She stressed that mental health education is a vital component to education. She explained that the bill aimed to ensure that it was treated with the same level of importance as physical education. The bill put together a group who were experts in the field, and would establish an age-appropriate curriculum that districts may choose whether to use in their schools. She stated that the bill

would create a tool to approach mental health differently. She remarked that it was a collaborative effort.

Co-Chair Foster recalled that the bill currently had public testimony OPEN, from the previous meeting. He remarked that there was a testifier that may not have received notice. He noted that there were no amendments.

Representative Galvin stated that there may be a former Commissioner Holloway on the line to testify.

Co-Chair Foster did not see the testifier online.

Representative Bynum had some suggestions for the author of the legislation, and stated that he would offer any amendments on the floor.

Representative Allard did not support the legislation. She felt that the bill had too much overreach. She remarked that teachers were government employees. She stressed that they were not doctors or guidance counselors. She was alarmed that there would be an addition to what teachers do, which she felt was to teach the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) courses. She remarked that she had mental health class as a child, but noted that it was much different than what would be offered in the current time. She was alarmed at the legislation. She felt that there would be repercussions to the bill. She felt that parents should not have to optout of the curriculum, but rather should have to opt-in.

Representative Hannan supported the legislation. She stressed that creating a curriculum did not require educators to diagnose or do doctors' referrals. She explained that there would be a curriculum that showed students that mental health, like physical health, had symptoms of distress before disorders to provide awareness. She stated that she had taught psychology for twenty years, and recalled that depression symptoms varied greatly among people.

Representative Bynum surmised that the bill provided guidelines for the state Board of Education to establish the appropriate instruction for mental health. He noted an elaborate list of direction, and wondered whether that was necessary for the board when the school districts already

autonomy over the selection of curriculum. He also wondered why there was a necessity to notify parents.

Representative Galvin clarified that the concept was that parents must be notified in advance of the curriculum being discussed. She stressed that there was a desire for parents to be understanding and a part of the conversation. She remarked that the experts felt that it was best to inform the parents. She wondered whether the prescriptive part was on page 3 of the bill.

Representative Bynum replied affirmatively.

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Representative Galvin responded that it had been put together by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA). She also noted that there were some districts were already accomplishing it and did not need a tool, but the idea was to remain flexible.

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Representative Bynum stated that he would follow up with additional questions outside of the committee

Co-Chair Josephson spoke to some anxiety people felt about the bill, that he did not think was necessary. He supported the bill.

Co-Chair Foster noted that someone was online for public testimony.

Co-Chair Foster OPENED public testimony.

MIKE COONS, SELF, WASILLA (via teleconference), spoke against the bill.

Co-Chair Foster CLOSED public testimony.

Co-Chair Foster recognized Senator Mike Shower in the room.

Representative Allard did not know how many parents were in the room and on the committee. She was a mom of two daughters. She relayed that when the school district tried to impose Bree's law she had not been in support. She did not think it was appropriate for government employees to

provide mental health education, and she believed parents should be able to opt in instead of opt out of the curriculum.

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Co-Chair Foster re-OPENED public testimony.

TREVOR STORRS, PRESIDENT AND CEO, ALASKA CHILDREN'S TRUST, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of the legislation.

Representative Stapp did not know why putting something voluntary in statute made sense. He asked about using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) for diagnosing the children.

Mr. Storrs replied that mental health education was not about diagnosis. It was about dealing with stress, anxiety, social media, and not about taking psychology 101. It was about how to self-regulate, and about dealing with the day to day mental health wellbeing.

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Representative Stapp liked Mr. Storrs definition. He was struggling to see it in relation to the bill.

Representative Allard was following along the same lines as Representative Stapp. She respected Mr. Storrs. She did not see his words and thought process in the bill.

DR. SHIRLEY HOLLOWAY, NAMI ALASKA, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of the bill. She hoped the bill passed. She stated it was not an opportunity to diagnose a child. She encouraged the committee to getting the bill passed in the current year to help students.

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Representative Stapp asked what exactly would be into the schools through the bill. He asked about the exact activities of the pilot program.

Dr. Holloway replied that there had been activities and prompts for questioning, interactions, and engagement in multiple categories, based on teachers' observations.

Representative Stapp provided a specific example. When he was seven years old his mother passed away. He had been depressed, and was referred to the school counselor. He asked what the activities and prompts would be occurring.

Dr. Holloway could not imagine other than there would be help to discuss how to talk about someone's death and did it get discussed with the class. She remarked that it was an opportunity to talk about loss and how it felt.

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Co-Chair Schrage remarked that the committee did not receive any amendments to the bill, but felt that his concerns could be addressed on the floor. He wanted to move the bill.

Representative Allard disagreed, and felt that the discussions could take place in committee. She stressed that it should not be rushed out of committee. She felt that Dr. Holloway did not give an adequate description of the curriculum.

Dr. Holloway replied that she had lost a daughter to suicide. She had an opportunity to talk with many people about their situations.

Representative Allard queried Ms. Holloway's specialty.

Dr. Hollway replied that her PHD was in educational leadership.

Representative Allard surmised that the testifier was not an expert in the field.

Dr. Holloway replied that she worked in the mental health field but was not an expert in mental health.

[3:02:22 PM](#)

Representative Allard felt that there were no teachers that would be experts in the mental health field.

Dr. Holloway stated that was the reason for the guidelines.

Co-Chair Foster CLOSED public testimony.

Co-Chair Schrage MOVED to REPORT HB 105 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

Representative Allard OBJECTED.

Representative Stapp felt that the intention of the bill was positive. He remarked that school districts already had the ability to provide the curriculum. He understood the need for curriculum, but did not want adverse diagnosis for the child. He hoped to get an example of how it worked, in order to give a clear point of view on the bill.

Representative Bynum understood the concept and stated his understanding of the goal of the bill was to provide course works that included the topic of mental health. He shared that after Iraq the Army recognized that suicides were very high. The Army had directed everyone to go through suicide prevention training, there had been some pushback, but after the fifth time they realized it was meaningful.

A roll call vote was taken on the motion.

IN FAVOR: Bynum, Galvin, Jimmie, Hannan, Schrage,
Josephson, Foster
OPPOSED: Tomaszewski, Allard, Stapp

The MOTION PASSED (7/3).

There being NO further OBJECTION, it was so ordered.

HB 105 was REPORTED out of committee with five "do pass" recommendations, one "do not pass" recommendation, and four "no recommendation" recommendations and with one new zero fiscal note from the Department of Health; one previously published fiscal impact note: FN1 (EED); and one previously published zero fiscal note: FN2 (DFC).

#hb174

HOUSE BILL NO. 174

"An Act relating to the regional educational attendance area and small municipal school district fund; relating to Mt. Edgecumbe High School; and relating to teacher housing."

[3:08:46 PM](#)

AT EASE

[3:11:24 PM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Foster asked for an introduction of the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE ROBYN NIAYUQ BURKE, SPONSOR, thanked the committee for hearing the bill. She relayed that the bill would amend Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) fund language to include both major maintenance and construction at Mt. Edgumbe High School; and major maintenance for teacher housing in regional education areas and small municipal areas as allowable uses for the fund. The legislation would remove the \$70 million cap on funding value.

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Co-Chair Foster OPENED public testimony.

Co-Chair Foster asked for a review of the fiscal note.

PAUL LABOLLE, STAFF, REPRESENTATIVE NEAL FOSTER, reviewed the Department of Education and Early Development fiscal note, OMB component 2737.

Co-Chair Foster clarified the control code and noted the fund source is general funds.

Co-Chair Foster moved to questions from the committee.

Representative Stapp thanked the sponsor for bringing the bill forward. He supported the bill.

Representative Tomaszewski asked if there were any requirements to attend Mt. Edgumbe.

Representative Burke replied that anyone was welcome to attend. Mt. Edgumbe was a public boarding school.

[3:18:16 PM](#)

Representative Tomaszewski asked if there was a maximum number of students. He asked if there was a waiting list.

Representative Burke replied that there were about 400 students in attendance, because there was limited dorm space. She believed the department said they received around 600 applicants per year. She deferred to the department for detail.

Representative Hannan stated that working at Mt. Edgecumbe was her first job out of college.

Representative Bynum appreciated the bill. He agreed with Representative Stapp. He recognized it was a state school and the responsibility of maintaining the school fell directly on the state. He asked for verification that the bill did not take away the state's responsibility for maintenance.

Representative Burke replied affirmatively.

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Representative Jimmie stated that Mt. Edgecumbe seemed like a prestigious school, and felt that it was important to maintain the school. She queried the year that Representative Burke graduated from Mt. Edgecumbe.

Representative Burke replied that she graduated from Mt. Edgecumbe in 2009.

Representative Allard commented on the generations of those in attendance of Mt. Edgecumbe related to Representative Burke.

Representative Burke stated once an Edgecumbe brave always an Edgecumbe brave. She shared information about her family.

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Representative Bynum looked at the FY 26 cost in the fiscal note. He noted the building maintenance facility specialist, and whether it was connected with residential design and construction. He asked if it was a worst case fiscal note.

Representative Burke noted that an individual from the department was on the line, but the intent was to figure out how to include housing under major maintenance for

REAAAs. She remarked that there was a number of rural districts had housing, but the question was whether the expertise needed for the future.

Representative Bynum remarked that being state owned it seemed there were resources available that may not be available.

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HEATHER HEINEKEN, DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND SUPPORT SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT (via teleconference), relayed there were two parts to the bill one position was specific, but the other did not have any technical expertise.

Representative Bynum stated that the explanation made sense to him.

Representative Stapp MOVED to REPORT HB 174 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal note.

HB 174 was REPORTED out of committee with six "do pass" recommendations and three "no recommendation" recommendations and with one previously published fiscal impact note: FN1 (EED).

#sb64

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 64(FIN) am

"An Act relating to elections; relating to voters; relating to voting; relating to voter registration; relating to election administration; relating to the Alaska Public Offices Commission; relating to campaign contributions; relating to the crimes of unlawful interference with voting in the first degree, unlawful interference with an election, and election official misconduct; relating to synthetic media in electioneering communications; relating to campaign signs; relating to voter registration on permanent fund dividend applications; relating to the Redistricting Board; relating to the duties of the commissioner of revenue; and providing for an effective date."

[3:32:45 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster asked for an introduction of the bill.

SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI, CHAIR, SENATE RULES COMMITTEE, introduced the legislation. He stated that the bill had been in the works for many years, and included provisions from ten different bills that had been introduced by many different legislators and the governor's office.

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AT EASE

[3:35:56 PM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Foster noted that the bill was large and substantial. His intent was to hear the introduction at present, and may come back later if possible.

DAVID DUNSMORE, STAFF, SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI, provided a PowerPoint presentation titled "SB 64 Election Reform" (copy on file). He began with slide 2, "SB 64 is a Comprehensive Election Reform Package":

- Cleans up Alaska's voter rolls
- Removes barriers to voting
- Faster and more transparent results reporting
- Ballot tracking barcodes for absentee ballots
- Bans the use of undisclosed deepfakes to influence elections
- Additional provisions to modernize Alaska's election laws

Mr. Dunsmore addressed slide 3, "SB 64 Includes Provisions from Bills Proposed by Republican, Democratic, and Independent Legislators in Recent Legislatures":

32nd Legislature

- SB 39 (Sen. Shower)
- HB 66 (Rep. Tuck)
- HB 157 (Rep. Rasmussen)
- HB 267 (Rep. Schrage)
- HB 286/ SB 167 (Governor)

33rd Legislature

- SB 1 (Sen. Shower)
- SB 5 (Sen. Shower)

- SB 7 (Sen. Shower)
- SB 19 (Sen. Kawasaki)
- HB 37 (Rep. Schrage)
- HB 129 (House Judiciary)
- SB 138 (Senate State Affairs)
- HB 358 (Rep. Cronk)

Mr. Dunsmore pointed to slide 4, "SB 64 includes several provisions from HB 63/ SB 70 introduced by the governor this year":

Repeals the requirement that poll worker pay be set by regulation

Repealing the requirement that absentee ballots that arrive after the deadline be counted during recounts

Allowing cover sheets for absentee ballot packets to be submitted electronically

Adding becoming ineligible for a PFD to the list of criteria that triggers a voter roll clean-up notice

Beginning absentee ballot review 12 days before the election, governor originally propose 10 days but the Senate extended it to 12 days

Stopping special needs ballots from being rejected due to mistakes by poll workers or representatives

Requiring postpaid return envelopes for absentee ballots

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Mr. Dunsmore turned to slide 5, "Voter registration list clean-up":

In 2022 it was estimated that Alaska's voter registration list was equal to 106 percent of the adult population. SB 64 streamlines the process of removing voters who have left the state.

Adds several indications of residency in another state to the list of factors that trigger notice and clarifies the definition of residency for voting.

Voters who do not verify their registration are moved to inactive status. Inactive voters will not appear on precinct registers although their votes will be counted, and their registration reactivated if they vote or request an absentee ballot.

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Mr. Dunsmore turned to slide 6, "Current Voter List Maintenance Process":

- Every January DOE mails nonforwardable notices to voters who have not voted, updated their registration, or signed a petition within two general elections or who have had mail from DOE returned to sender.
- If the voter does not respond confirming their address, DOE mails a second forwardable notice informing the voter that if they do not confirm their address within 45 days their registration will be inactivated.
- Inactive voters registrations are canceled completely if the voter does not vote or contact DOE within two general elections.

Mr. Dunsmore looked at slide 7, "Expedited process under SB 64":

- DOE will mail a single forwardable notice requesting voters confirm their address within 45 days
- SB 64 expands the number of voters who will be sent notices to include voters who there is evidence have claimed residency in another state
- This process remains in compliance with the requirements of the National Voter Registration Act

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Mr. Dunsmore moved to slide 8, "SB 64 requires notices be sent when DOE learns a voter...":

- Registers to vote in another state
- Receives a driver's license in another state
- Registers a vehicle in another state
- Receives public assistance from another state
- Serves on a jury in another state
- Obtains a resident hunting or fishing license from in another state

- Pays resident tuition for a public university in another state
- Receives a residential property tax exemption in another state
- Receives a benefit only available to residents of another stat

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Mr. Dunsmore turned to slide 9, "Annual Review of Master Voter List":

Requires DOE to hire a nationally recognized subject matter expert to review the voter registration list

Expert will prepare an annual report to the Legislature making recommendations for improving Alaska's list management practices

Mr. Dunsmore addressed slide 10, "Clarifies the definition of residency and process to challenge a voter's residency":

This bill clarifies that a voter's residence is a place where they have an articulable and reasonable plan to return to whenever they are absent.

It also establishes that the presumption a voter's registered address is accurate can be rebutted by evidence that they reside at another location.

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Mr. Dunsmore moved to slide 11, "Voter ID reforms":

- Adds tribal IDs to the list of acceptable IDs for voting and voter registration
- Removes hunting and fishing licenses from the list of acceptable identification
- Requires that utility bills, government checks, paychecks, or other government documents must be issued within the last 60 days to be used as identification

Representative Tomaszewski asked if a state or other picture ID was required to vote.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that Alaska did not require a picture ID. Alaska's voter registration cards were not picture ID.

Representative Tomaszewski asked if the bill included a provision stating that a person needed a photo ID when voting.

Mr. Dunsmore replied in the negative.

Representative Bynum asked whether the presentation would include current acceptable processes, and what was actually being removed from law.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that there was not a slide with those specific ID requirements. The voter ID provisions showed up several places in statute.

Representative Bynum would coordinate with staff on the alignment for proper preparation for the debate portion of the bill process.

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Mr. Dunsmore moved to slide 12, "Codifies a procedure for voters to cancel their registration":

Currently the Division of Elections will cancel a voter's registration if they request, but it is not required by statute.

Voters would be allowed to cancel their registration in person or electronically.

The process for cancelling a registration would be posted at polling places.

Mr. Dunsmore addressed slide 13, "Updating election related crimes":

- Adds opening or tampering with ballot envelopes or packages, and hacking election equipment or software to the crime of unlawful interference with an election
- Adds knowingly disclosing results before the polls close or any confidential election information to the crime of election official misconduct in the first degree
- Both of these crimes are class C felonies

Mr. Dunsmore highlighted slide 14, "Codifies Data Sharing Between PFD Division and DOE":

Data will be shared monthly for purposes of voter registration, confirming residence of a voter, identifying duplicate registrations, detecting voters who moved, and detecting ineligible voters

Data will include addresses, whether the applicant opted out of voter registration, and names of people attesting to the applicant's residency

SB 64 also codifies PFD applicant's right to opt-out of registering to vote or updating their registration

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Mr. Dunsmore turned to slide 15, "SB 64 removes barriers to voting":

Repeals the witness signature requirement for absentee by mail ballots

Stops special needs ballots from being rejected because of mistakes by poll workers or representatives

Creates a ballot curing process

Requires secure ballot drop boxes be made available

Requires postage paid return postage for absentee by mail envelopes

Mr. Dunsmore discussed slide 16, "Repeals the witness signature requirement for by-mail ballots":

- In the 2022 special primary election, 2,724 ballots were rejected because of a missing witness signature-1.7 percent of all ballots cast.
- Witness signature rejections disproportionately affected rural Alaska and military voters.
- In District 38, 10.9 percent of all ballots cast were rejected for missing witness signatures in the 2022 special primary.

- In the 2024 general election, District 18, which is mostly Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, had more by mail ballots rejected than any other district.
- There is no indication of any misconduct with these rejected ballots.

Representative Bynum // Senate minority members. He asked if the bill was compiled by a taskforce //

Mr. Dunsmore responded that the provisions to repeal the witness signature // there had been a bill by a previous // He concluded slide 16 //

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Mr. Dunsmore moved to slide 17, "The witness signature requirement provides no meaningful election integrity protection":

- DOE has testified that they do not verify that witness signatures meet the statutory requirement that they be from a person at least 18.
- The Division accepts as valid any mark made in the witness signature portion of the envelope.
- There is no practical way for DOE to verify the identity and age of witnesses from other states and countries.
- The absentee by-mail envelope does not even provide space for the witness to print their name or provide their date of birth.

Co-Chair Foster would recess the meeting. He would keep public testimony open throughout the process.

3:52:08 PM

RECESSED

5:59:10 PM

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Foster OPENED public testimony and would leave it open throughout the process. He intended to hear the bill the following day at both meetings. He wanted to get through the bill introduction during the current meeting and review fiscal notes. He realized there was some urgency to see the bill move during the current year while making sure to do the due diligence. He had been encouraged to set

an amendment deadline for the following evening, but it was very soon. People seemed to be okay with setting an amendment deadline of Saturday morning at 9:00 a.m.

Representative Allard wondered if the amendment deadline could be pushed to Saturday at noon. She had not been briefed on the bill.

Co-Chair Foster stated he would set an amendment deadline of noon on Saturday with the intent of hearing the amendments and reporting the bill out later that day.

[6:04:29 PM](#)

AT EASE

[6:04:40 PM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the public testimony call in numbers.

[6:05:36 PM](#)

AT EASE

[7:14:48 PM](#)

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Foster am deadline for Saturday at 12pm but requested submission of the amendments as soon as possible.

[7:17:40 PM](#)

MELISSA PATACK, MOTION PICTURE ASSOCIATION, LOS ANGELES, CA (via teleconference), testified to propose an amendment section 64 of the bill starting on page 26. She referred to the "deceptive synthetic media section" of the bill. She remarked that the amendments aligned with laws adopted in several other states. She stated that the first amendment would add a timeframe to the provision, which was "within ninety days of an election." She furthered that in the paragraph that exempted certain services, that other applications were also exempted as long as they were not the creator of the synthetic deceptive media.

Representative Stapp remarked that the synthetic media would ban "memes", and felt that he was struggling with the intention of the section.

Ms. Patack responded that that parody and satire were protected by the first amendment, but remarked that there may be synthetic portrayal in the future.

Representative Bynum asked the testifier to follow up with her suggestions via email.

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DAVID JOHNSON, SELF, WASILLA (via teleconference), did not like the bill. He said he was knowledgeable about voting, and remarked that dead people were voting. He stated that the problem was not solved, and felt that the hand count portion was excluded. He stressed that correct numbers were important. He asked to look at a logic and accuracy test, and felt that the machines could be breached. He felt that there was no transparency, and stressed that non-citizens should not be voting

[7:29:28 PM](#)

Representative Allard asked him to email her his remarks.

Mr. Johnson said the email would not work. He would email Senator Shower.

Representative Stapp asked if he considered the bill an election reform bill or a voter fraud bill.

Mr. Johnson responded that no one was held accountable for voting.

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ALEX KOPLIN, SELF, HOMER (via teleconference), felt opposite as the previous testifier and supported elections, and felt that the division was doing a good job. He appreciated the collaboration and compromise of the legislators.

Representative Stapp appreciated the comments on incrementalism.

[7:36:14 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore continued the presentation on page 18:

Alaska Law Generally Allows Self-Certification of Documents, and the Division of Elections Accepts Self-Certification of Petition Booklets

Representative Allard asked about it disenfranchising military voters.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that in the previous general election, the district that had the highest number of rejected absentee ballots was a district with mostly military voters.

Representative Allard asked what was the proof or statistics from the Division of Elections on that assertion of disenfranchisement. She wondered whether it was because of lack of witness signature on the ballot.

Mr. Dunsmore responded in the affirmative.

Representative Allard thought they should still do the witness signature.

Representative Stapp asked what mechanism could be utilized instead of the witness signature.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that it would be the same as the current mechanism for special needs ballots and questioned ballots, which was to verify the identifiers provided by the voters. He furthered that the Senate Finance Committee added the sharing of the names of those who had attested for availability for investigation.

Representative Stapp wondered whether there was a link between permanent fund dividend (PFD) fraud and voter fraud. He asked for an elaboration on that mechanism.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that it was the data sharing on the PFD application.

[7:41:20 PM](#)

Representative Allard asked about active duty military members, and the assertion of the lack of witness signature.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that the Division of Elections only provided the data at the district level.

Representative Allard asked why the largest city requested that there were signatures on the ballot, and why the state would counter that request.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that it did not require a witness signature. He stated that the municipality used signature verification software. He stated that the fiscal notes were cost-prohibitive on that software.

Representative Allard surmised that the Municipality of Anchorage did not support witness signatures on ballots.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that he did not know how recent a change that took place.

Representative Allard disagreed. She queried what were the security measures in place to ensure that someone was not forging a signature.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that the voter was required to provide an identifier that would be verified in the ballot process. He stated that the process was already in place.

Representative Allard surmised that there was nothing added as security for the absentee ballot.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that there had been no evidence of the witness signature providing election integrity. He shared that there was no verification of witness signature.

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Representative Allard asked what the proof was that there was no proof of fraud.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that the last point was that there had not been any evidence of fraud being prevented but there was evidence of voters ballots being thrown out for a technical error on the witness signature.

Representative Allard asked why it would not be stricter for the Division of Elections to implement verification of the witness signature.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that the law required that the witness be over 18 years old. He stated that there was no possibility on the envelope for the witness to provide further verification measures.

Representative Allard stressed that other states did enforce the witness verification. She stressed that voters were disenfranchised, because those individuals were not notified that their ballot was determined to be a rejection.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that it was in the bill included ballot curing, and the division did send people a letter when their letter was thrown out.

Representative Allard asked how they knew it was voter fraud if they did not check the signature.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that ballots would not be rejected for the lack of witness signature, but would be rejected for an identifier.

Representative Allard thought it would allow people to commit voter fraud due to the bill, because of the lack of witness signature.

[7:50:19 PM](#)

Representative Bynum wondered if there were options for voters to have their vote be counted if their ballot was rejected by the Division of Elections.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that the division determined that to be a prohibition against voting twice.

Representative Bynum asked about the signature verification issue, and argued that the fiscal note issue was really a matter of policy. He wondered whether there were discussions about adding further witness signature verification requirements in the law.

Mr. Dunsmore did not think that discussions came up in the Senate.

Representative Bynum felt that the issue was more important than the fiscal note. He wondered about the design of the ballots.

[7:55:46 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore asked if he was talking about the ballot envelope or the ballot itself.

Representative Bynum replied that he was concerned with the ballot envelope.

Mr. Dunsmore replied there were no specifics in statute about the envelope.

Representative Bynum felt that the instruction process could be clearer for voters.

Mr. Dunsmore stated that there were no specifications about the ballot envelope in statute.

[7:57:44 PM](#)

Co-Chair Josephson expressed concern about the rejected ballots due to the lack of witness signature. He wondered whether there were circumstances where there was a witness signature, that was never verified, and the ballot was accepted as a valid ballot. He wondered whether a ballot was rejected due to a lack of witness signature, even though the person was an actual person submitting a ballot.

Mr. Dunsmore agreed, and replied in the affirmative.

Co-Chair Josephson looked forward to correcting that issue.

Representative Jimmie wondered how someone be able to obtain a required witness signature from an adult 18 or older to validate their ballot.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that the youth ambassador program was available, but they would not meet the statutory requirements for a witness signature.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that there was not an attempt to enforce the witness signature verification, because a witness may not be a registered voter.

[8:01:39 PM](#)

Representative Allard wondered if there was a way to investigate voter fraud through the division.

8:02:02 PM

CAROL BEECHER, DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF ELECTIONS, OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR (via teleconference), the Division of Elections did not investigate, rather there were issues referred to the Department of Law to make the decision whether to investigate.

Representative Allard asked if there was input by the division that the witness signature should be removed from statute.

Ms. Beecher responded that the division did not make policy, but rather commented on the outcome of the policy.

Representative Allard wondered whether the witness signature was beneficial to the ballot submission. She queried the cost of the witness signature.

Ms. Beecher responded that the cost of the witness verification for Anchorage, which was estimated to be \$1 million for each witness verification machines. She restated that it was not the role of the division to make policy statements.

Representative Allard asked if she personally thought that the witness signature helped or did not help the Division of Elections.

Ms. Beecher responded that the witness signature was in statute and had been for many years. She stressed that there had been no evidence of fraud.

Representative Allard asked if fraud had been committed with the witness signature.

Ms. Beecher responded that they had turned over what was something untoward on a witness signature, which resulted in prosecution.

8:07:19 PM

Representative Allard asked if it was \$1 million for each machine.

Ms. Beecher responded that it was based on the cost of machines that the municipality had, so the regions would be the ones that had to have the machine.

Representative Allard remarked on the large cost difference between \$5 million and \$12 million.

Representative Bynum requested the number of machines in the Municipality of Anchorage.

Ms. Beecher responded that there was only one machine.

Representative Bynum felt that not having any connecting information could be problematic. He wondered whether the ballot curing would solve the problem of an incomplete ballot.

Mr. Dunsmore responded in the affirmative. He felt that there would still be a requirement of the voter to take a proactive step.

Representative Bynum asked what the timeframe was for ballots to be sent out.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that the ballot could be mailed 45 days before the election.

[8:11:50 PM](#)

Representative Jimmie stated that in rural Alaska in 2022 there was 13.74 percent rejection rate. She stressed that it was significantly higher than the state average. She felt that it indicated disenfranchisement.

Mr. Dunsmore agreed.

Representative Allard remarked that the rural communities could "count the tapes" and "send the tapes." She surmised that there could be an adjustment date, and felt that the deadline should be changed to the day of the election.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that votes cast in precincts in mostly rural districts did a hand count on site. He remarked that there were not subsequent counts, but there were several villages that were not included in the counts.

Representative Allard asked if most ballots were impacted due to lack of witness signatures.

Mr. Dunsmore replied in the affirmative.

Representative Allard asked why they could not get witness signatures.

[8:15:11 PM](#)

Representative Jimmie stressed that the weather impacted the transportation of the ballots.

Representative Allard surmised that most rural communities voted by absentee ballot.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that there were some in person precincts, but some villages did not have access to a precinct. He also stressed the problem of staffing polling places.

Representative Allard felt that the state was failing the constituents. She asked how many people in rural voted by absentee, due to not having reasonable access to a polling place.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that he did not know the data.

Representative Allard asked if she could pose the question to Ms. Beecher.

Ms. Beecher responded that she would follow up with the specific, and shared that there were permanent absentee voting sites.

Representative Allard asked if voters could call in and vote on the phone.

Ms. Beecher responded that they could not vote over the phone but could vote via fax.

Representative Allard wondered whether they voted on sample ballots.

Ms. Beecher would follow up on that question.

[8:20:28 PM](#)

Representative Bynum commented that the election system was overall very complicated for many different reasons.

Representative Jimmie commented that absentee voting was important in rural areas.

Representative Allard was concerned that the maker of the bill was using the military as an excuse, but felt that it did not line up with her percentages.

Mr. Dunsmore would verify the information.

[8:24:05 PM](#)

Representative Hannan asserted that there were a variety of ways for Alaskans to participate in voting. Ser husband had never voted in person because he was always commercial fishing and it was not possible.

Representative Johnson was nervous that they could do due diligence they needed to do in the next few days on the bill, and did not think there was enough time to work on it.

Co-Chair Foster stated that he would recess the meeting until 9 the next morning.

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the meeting agenda for the following morning.

SB 64 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

[Although he said adjourned, he intended to say recessed. The meeting was treated as recessed. The meeting reconvened the following morning at 9:13 a.m. See separate minutes dated 5/15/25 for detail.]

#

RECESSED

[8:31:04 PM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 8:31 p.m.