

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
May 15, 2025  
1:41 p.m.

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CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Foster called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 1:41 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

Senator Forrest Dunbar, Sponsor; Representative Maxine Dibert, Sponsor; Brodie Anderson, Staff, Representative Neal Foster; Mattie Hull, Staff, Representative Maxine Dibert; Sonja Kawasaki, Senate Majority Counsel; Representative Sarah Vance; Senator Mike Shower.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Janna Preston, Self, Anchorage; Julia Inga, Self, Palmer; Suzanne Benson, Self, Eagle River; Patrick McConnaughey, Self, Eagle River; Randy Ruedrich, Self, Anchorage; Crystal Toennis, Self, Big Lake; Mike Garvey, Policy Director, ACLU Alaska, Anchorage; Linda Holmsprom, Self, Anchorage; Kendra Kloster, Director of Government Relations, Alaska Federation of Natives, Anchorage; Charlie Franz, Self,

Homer; Brittani Robbins, Self, Wrangell; Tom Stewart, Director of Policy, Secure Democracy USA, Baltimore, MD; Emily Leak-Michie, Director, Alaska Voter Hub, Anchorage; Marianne E Burke, Self, Wasilla; Sami Graham, Self, Anchorage; Mike Coons, Self, Wasilla; Kirsten Gerbatsch, Native American Rights Fund, Copper Center; Marge Stoneking, Advocacy Director, AARP Alaska, Anchorage; Michael Jones, Self, Homer; Gerald Voss, Self, Juneau; Rita Trometter, Self, North Pole; Kelly Nash, Founder, Interior Patriots, Fairbanks; Bernie Hoffman, Self, Fairbanks; Jamie Donley, Self, Eagle River; Barbara Haney, Self, North Pole; Donald Thompson, Self, North Pole; Kristeen F Peterson, Self, Juneau; Ray Kreig, Self, Anchorage; Natalie Lynch, Innovative Lending Platform, Washington, DC; Cathy Brennan, Partner, Hudson Cook Law Firm, Baltimore, MD; Andy Bartel, Self, Anchorage; Greg Porter, Online Lender's Alliance, Arlington, VA; Mike Coons, Self, Wasilla; Wendy Gibson, Check City, Provo, UT; Kay Wright, Self, Nikiski; Mateo Jaime, Community Relations Liaison, Facing Foster Care, Anchorage; Benjamin Mallott, President and Chief Executive Officer, Alaska Federation of Natives, Anchorage; Steven Pearce, Director, Citizens Commission on Human Rights, Seattle; Robert Nave, Division Operations Manager, Division of Health Care Services, Department of Health; Carol Beecher, Director, Division of Elections.

#### SUMMARY

HB 52 MINORS & PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS

HB 52 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

CSSB 39(FIN)

LOANS UNDER \$25,000; PAYDAY LOANS

CSSB 39(FIN) was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

CSSB 64(FIN) am

ELECTIONS

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

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the meeting agenda. He explained that the committee would continue to hear a public testimony on SB 64.

#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."

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Co-Chair Foster opened public testimony.

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JANNA PRESTON, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in opposition to SB 64. She stated that voting was a privilege for citizens invested in Alaska's communities and eligibility could not be confirmed on the same day. She believed mail-in voting was already full of potholes. She thought the bill removed guard rails needed for fair elections and undermined accountability, credibility, and integrity of the elections process. She believed a high bar needed to be set.

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JULIA INGA, SELF, PALMER (via teleconference), spoke against the bill because it weakened traditional in-person voting. She stated that casting ballots on election day kept elections secure and trustworthy. She remarked that the bill loosened residency rules potentially allowing non-residents to vote and allowed utility bills as ID. She believed the changes would undermine the voting system. She

thought the bill should be amended to keep witness signatures. She supported the removal of Dominion voting machines. She wanted traditional voting protected.

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SUZANNE BENSON, SELF, EAGLE RIVER (via teleconference), testified in strong opposition to the bill and mail-in voting in general and ballot boxes. She stated that same-day voting registration meant there was no time to verify [a voter's eligibility]. She asked members to vote against the bill.

Representative Bynum asked if there would be additional time for the public to call in while the bill was being heard.

Co-Chair Foster responded in the affirmative. He stated that he would leave public testimony open throughout hearing the bill.

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PATRICK MCCONNAUGHEY, SELF, EAGLE RIVER (via teleconference), agreed with all of the previous testifiers. He thought the bill opened up the system to potential voter fraud. He believed there were enough problems already with the way mail-in dates were run. He thought voting in favor of the bill would be foolish and almost criminal. He wanted to get rid of ranked choice voting. He asked members to vote against the bill.

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RANDY RUEDRICH, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), he had lived in the state for 50 years and he was troubled with the idea of changing the state's election process to a mail-in process. He thought the bill would implement various things that were unsuitable for any election. He stated that ballot drop boxes had been shown to be a tool of harvesting illegal ballots. He remarked that the bill would result in repeated delivery of absentee ballots to voters in permanent absentee status. He stated that when the method had been used in the past it resulted in a response rate of less than 20 percent. He wondered how many of the voters were legitimate under the circumstance. He opposed the elimination of the witness signature. He

thought the residency issue in Section 1 of the bill was devastating to the military and young people. He wanted to ensure people came back to Alaska and their right to vote was critical. He opposed the passage of the bill.

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CRYSTAL TOENNIS, SELF, BIG LAKE (via teleconference), testified in opposition to the bill. She stated that Alaska residency required living in the state for one year. She did not support same-day voting registration. She believed there was a lot of outside influence and money in Alaska's elections. She thought there had been a fraudulent presidential race. She supported in-person voting and voter verification.

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Co-Chair Foster noted the email address to send testimony.

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MIKE GARVEY, POLICY DIRECTOR, ACLU ALASKA, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), shared that the ACLU supported the bill because overall it was a good compromise that would help uphold voting rights of Alaskans and improve the integrity and administration of elections. The bill included the creation of a rural community liaison and language to ensure that special needs ballots were not rejected because of errors made by an election official or representative. He spoke in support of sections to repeal the witness signature requirement and to establish a ballot curing system. He stated it would address the ongoing problem of Alaskans having their ballot rejected due to administrative errors on the ballot envelopes. He stressed that every district in the state was impacted by the problem. He detailed that in the 2024 general election, 299 ballots were rejected, almost half due to the witness signature requirement. He elaborated that 199 of the 299 ballots could have been counted under SB 64. He stated that ensuring eligible votes were counted was essential for upholding individual voting rights. He added that it would also make sure elections reflected the will of the voters. He stated that passage of the bill would allow the Division of Elections adequate time to implement changes ahead of the 2026 elections. He noted that the division adopted regulations to formally end the process of accepting

ballots with minor errors on the envelopes. He detailed that because of the regulation change, it was reasonable to expect ballot rejection rates would increase. The Alaska Superior Court ruled earlier in the year that the responsibility to implement a ballot curing system fell to the legislature. During litigation, the division agreed it had the capacity to implement such a system. He remarked that voting was a constitutional right, and it was important that Alaskans taking time to participate in elections had confidence their votes would be counted. He urged the committee to pass the legislation.

2:00:09 PM

LINDA HOLMSPROM, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), shared that she had lived in Alaska for over 35 years. She disagreed with the previous testifier and was opposed to the bill. She believed the bill decreased voter confidence. She stated that the bill took away safeguards and impacted the integrity of the election process. She thought it opened the door to voter fraud and registration errors. She believed taking away the witness signature requirement for absentee voting increased the risk of fraud. She thought allowing voters to fix issues on a ballot resulted in an improper cast ballot. She believed the bill would allow people with malintent to use the system in an improper way. She stated that the bill decreased transparency of the campaign finance laws to donors outside of Alaska. She believed transparency was essential in order to know who was donating to campaigns.

2:02:21 PM

KENDRA KLOSTER, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), shared information about the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN). She stated that AFN had always been a strong supporter of voting rights and ensuring the election system was fair, accessible, and secure. She shared that she had been working on the election reform bill for at least a decade. She noted that many of the provisions in the bill had been discussed in previous election bills. She stressed that the reforms were critically important, especially for rural Alaska. She emphasized the importance of a voting system that was accessible for all Alaskans to ensure their voices were heard. She stated that removing the witness signature provision was critical. She pointed out that the

state did not validate witness signatures and they were not a means for deterring fraud. She highlighted the Arctic Village Council versus Kevin Meyer case as an example. She stated that the witness signature requirement discarded many Alaskan voters with good intentions. She highlighted the ballot curing provision in the bill, which was used by more than 30 other states. She remarked that people may make mistakes and it did not mean their ballots should be discounted. She noted that rural liaisons were critically important to help individuals in rural Alaska and other areas to ensure everyone had the ability to vote. The bill would take important steps to improve election integrity, security, and to ensure all Alaskans were counted. She shared that the bipartisan bill had been a collaborative process. The bill would ensure all Alaskans had the ability to vote. She implored the committee to pass the legislation.

[2:05:37 PM](#)

Representative Bynum for the primary reason ballots were being returned without the witness signature being performed.

Ms. Kloster responded that when elders had to look for a witness signature it was sometimes a barrier. She noted it had been evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. She explained that under law, voters were required to include a voter identifier on mail-in ballots. She elaborated that witness signatures were not verified, and the state was only looking to see that a mark had been made on the signature line. She remarked that it was possible for an individual to sign their own ballot on the witness line. She did not believe it was a helpful requirement.

Representative Bynum asked for specific reasons the witness signature may not be filled out. He noted the reference that elders were potentially impacted by the requirement. He asked if there had been any data driven studies showing what types of ballots were being rejected because the witness signatures were not included.

Ms. Kloster replied that she could follow up with information after the hearing.

Representative Allard thought Ms. Kloster brought a good case forward for not having witness signatures. She asked

if regions 4 and 5 covered the rural communities. She believed region 4 was Nome.

Ms. Kloster confirmed there were multiple regions covering rural Alaska. She added the regions were also the places AFN was looking to see rural liaisons to provide additional support.

Representative Allard agreed. She shared that region 4 had 2,642 individuals who voted absentee. She detailed that 13 had been rejected for no witness signatures and it did not include special needs ballots. She relayed that out of 16,470 absentee votes in region 5, 35 were rejected for no witness signature. She would provide the information to the committee. She stated that the Division of Elections had just put the correct information out. She clarified that there had only been 512 individuals in the entire state rejected for no witness signatures.

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Representative Jimmie asked for verification that people who were voting fraudulently would likely not have a problem faking a witness signature.

Ms. Kloster believed that was the case if a person's intention was voter fraud.

Representative Jimmie asked for verification that it would hurt people who were trying to do the right thing.

Ms. Kloster agreed. She believed Alaskans who were going out to vote were there for the right reasons. She stated if fraud was being committed, the Division of Elections could refer the cases to the Department of Law for investigation. Generally, she believed Alaskans wanted their voices heard and counted. She thought whatever could be done to improve the system to ensure people could vote was incredibly important.

[2:11:58 PM](#)

CHARLIE FRANZ, SELF, HOMER (via teleconference), opposed SB 64. He thought the pre-registration for 16 year-olds would add additional complexity for the Division of Elections in managing voter rolls. He thought the division already did a poor job managing voter rolls. He thought same-day

registration and voting would complicate the verification of a voter's identity and ability to vote. He believed it would likely delay the collection of election results. He did not support the removal of the witness signature. He thought witness requirements should be strengthened. He thought ballot curing made no sense. He suggested that if someone could not date and sign their ballot, perhaps it should not be counted. He believed the idea of adding drop boxes for ballots was contradictory to the idea of requiring the Division of Elections to provide postage paid envelopes for people to return absentee ballots. He remarked that most ballots in Alaska were cast in-person. He noted that the bill did not include any requirement for photo identification; therefore, it weakened election security. He strongly opposed the bill.

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Representative Galvin clarified that she was hearing quite a few things that may not exist in the bill. For example, she believed the pre-registration for 16 year-olds may be in a different bill. Another item mentioned related to drop boxes. She remarked that the committee had only heard 17 pages of the bill presentation. She hoped they could gain a better understanding of the bill. She was not currently in a place where she could ask the previous speaker questions. She had read the bill and understood in part, but she felt the process was a little skewed. She understood it was the end of session. She hoped to have a better understanding of what was included and what was not included in the bill, especially when listening to people tell the committee how to vote.

Co-Chair Foster agreed and was not excited about the bill coming over so late with so many people wanting to see it potentially pass. He agreed the process was a bit messy and he wished the committee had heard the complete introduction. He noted that public testimony had been moved around. He agreed that the committee did not know everything the bill included because it had not heard the full roll out of the bill.

[2:17:08 PM](#)

BRITTANI ROBBINS, SELF, WRANGELL (via teleconference), shared information about her professional background including that she was a current member of the Wrangell

Assembly. She confirmed that Representative Galvin was correct that some of the things said prior to her testimony pertained to prior versions of the bill. She relayed that she had the privilege to travel throughout rural Alaska prior to the general election to knock on thousands of doors to remind individuals of the election and to hear reasons why they may not be voting. She had heard from individuals in Utqiagvik, Nome, and Bethel where smaller more rural communities had to get their votes to hub communities in order for their vote to be counted. She had heard it was too hard, especially for elders. She had been told it had been freezing, windy, and difficult to navigate on foot. She relayed that individuals did not know an election was taking place because they did not have the Division of Elections or people in offices spreading the word. She noted that rural hub communities had city halls where elections could be discussed, but the word was not spread in the smaller communities. Additionally, individuals did not feel heard or included; therefore, they did not see a reason to vote due to various reasons. She relayed that individuals had told her they did not have anywhere to go to vote. Communities outside the hub communities did not have a post office and did not have locations to vote. She noted that in the case where there was a location to vote, there was rarely someone there to run the election and take ballots.

Ms. Robbins remarked that traditional in-person voting was inequitable for the state as a whole and it dismissed rural residents. She spoke about the importance of removing the witness signature requirement. She stressed that the bill opened an opportunity for all Alaskan communities to vote and be counted. She underscored it was infuriating and heartbreaking to constantly watch legislators ignore or discount residents and the land in Southeast Alaska, the Aleutians, and West Coast islands. She emphasized that individuals in those locations are Alaskans, and the bill gave individuals power for their voices to be heard. She underscored that just because communities were not on the road system did not mean their voices did not matter.

[2:21:31 PM](#)

TOM STEWART, DIRECTOR OF POLICY, SECURE DEMOCRACY USA, BALTIMORE, MD (via teleconference), shared information about the organization, a nonpartisan, nonprofit working to build stronger elections state by state. The organization

had met with legislators and individuals at the Division of Elections in the hopes of creating bipartisan consensus to improve election administration and voting integrity for Alaska's elections. He would include written comments as well. He stressed that the bill would strengthen election security, transparency, accountability, and administration in Alaska. He stated the bill was a significant improvement over the status quo. He underscored that election integrity started with voter list maintenance. The bill included numerous bipartisan and in several cases, conservative policy proposals to clean up Alaska's voter rolls. He stated that curing was a security measure as well. When there were questions that raised the prospect of a mistake or fraud, it created a point of contact in which a voter was able to verify their identity and the validity of their ballot. He emphasized that it was good for access, security, and confidence.

Mr. Stewart relayed that states had been moving away from witness requirements for some time. The organization greatly encouraged Alaska to move in that direction. He explained that witness requirements did not enhance security, but it created a situation where valid ballots were thrown out. He thanked the committee for its work. He stressed that the 2026 election would be a better, more secure election, with tangible improvements by advancing the bill.

Representative Allard asked if Mr. Stewart agreed that voters should not be required to show photo identification. She thought it appeared that Mr. Stewart had read the bill.

Mr. Stewart responded that the organization worked in states that required photo identification, states where voters were prompted to present identification (but it was not necessarily required), and in states where it was not a requirement in statute. He stressed that the list maintenance on the front end was incredibly important in terms of identity verification. There were many valid approaches to verify voter identity, including photo identification.

Representative Allard asked if Mr. Stewart thought there should not be photo identification required in the bill.

Mr. Stewart responded that if there were a proposal and consensus to do so, he would gladly review it and perhaps

recommend it. He highlighted that the security measures in the bill were a significant improvement for list maintenance, election security, and election integrity.

Representative Allard speculated that it meant Mr. Stewart did not think photo identification was necessary in the bill. She referenced Mr. Stewart's earlier statement that parts of the bill were conservative. She asked for specifics.

Mr. Stewart clarified that the previous session, Senator Mike Shower championed SB 1 and the House Judiciary Committee chaired by Representative Sarah Vance sponsored similar legislation, HB 132. He elaborated that both proposals included some provisions that were substantively similar to SB 64. He noted that some of the provisions had attracted substantial attention or ire from some testifiers such as providing a uniform and statewide cure process for voters and eliminating the witness requirement without adding signature verification.

Representative Allard remarked that the current bill did not include the same things as the bills the previous year. She thought it was not a very truthful statement, but she respected Mr. Stewart's opinion.

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Representative Bynum was inclined to agree that witness signatures were an outdated mechanism that could be overcome with technology. He asked if Mr. Stewart would be in favor of signature verification for the voter submitting the ballot.

Mr. Stewart responded that it was certainly possible. He stated that so much depended on language. The organization had supported different versions of the current bill and previous iterations of very similar proposals that did include provisions requiring the implementation of signature verification. He believed signature verification was used by approximately 30 to 31 states, and it was the most common method for adding verification onto the absentee by-mail voting process. He noted it was not the only method and about 10 states used other forms of verification. He highlighted that the most recent state to remove a witness signature requirement was Virginia, which was signed into law by Governor Glenn Youngkin. He noted

that Virginia did not adopt signature verification and required voter identifier information to be provided that was not unlike the process for question or special needs ballots in Alaska.

Representative Bynum asked if Mr. Stewart would be in support of some verification mechanism for mail-in ballots in some cases.

Mr. Stewart responded, "Absolutely." He elaborated that it became a multifaceted question [indecipherable]. The organization had no objection and had frequently supported similar provisions.

[2:31:47 PM](#)

EMILY LEAK-MICHIE, DIRECTOR, ALASKA VOTER HUB, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill. She shared that the Voter Hub sought to ensure all eligible Alaskan voters were able to cast a ballot and to ensure that all valid votes were counted. She detailed that the provisions in the bill would expand voting access to voters in rural areas and ensure that voters with disabilities were able to vote and that their vote was counted. The organization worked with nonpartisan nonprofit organizations and community groups to reach voters across the state. She highlighted that when a voter made an effort to cast a ballot, but an honest error was made, the ballot was thrown out. She stated it was incredibly discouraging and did not inspire a voter to return to the polls. She relayed that a ballot cure process would fix the problem. It would allow voters the opportunity to fix honest mistakes on their ballot. She added that it would improve election security by verifying Alaskan voters. She relayed that currently witness signatures were not verified by the state. She explained that it was not adding additional security measures to the vote-by-mail system; however, the identifier provided by voters did provide assurance. She stated that the witness signature requirement was preventing eligible voters from having their vote counted. She acknowledged that the bill had been a long time coming. There had been many iterations of the bill over the years. She characterized the bill as a bipartisan compromise that included amendments from individuals on all sides of the aisle. She stressed that the bill would improve election security and would ensure the election system was secure and fair. She encouraged swift passage of the bill.

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Representative Allard agreed with curing ballots. She did not believe the witness signature was doing anything for the system. She asked if Ms. Leak-Michie believed a voter's signature should be verified, similarly to the current process used by the Municipality of Anchorage.

Ms. Leak-Michie responded that she appreciated the way the Municipality of Anchorage ran its elections, and she appreciated its witness verification process. She would be in favor of a similar system if it could be applied statewide.

Representative Allard stated that in order for individuals to be able to cure ballots, the state needed to be able to have identification. She asked if Ms. Leak-Michie thought government issued ID should be used. She asked if she knew of anyone personally who did not have a government issued ID that would hinder them from voting.

Ms. Leak-Michie responded that she would be eager to have a discussion on the topic. She stated if there was a precedent for it, she would be open to having a discussion on the ID requirement.

[2:37:13 PM](#)

MARIANNE E BURKE, SELF, WASILLA (via teleconference), expressed opposition to the bill. She thought there was some effort to clean up the registration, but she believed there were also numerous holes. She was concerned about adding drop boxes, allowing same-day voting registration, and the validation of ID with bank statements and utility bills. She thought it would mean non-US citizens would be able to vote. She supported getting rid of Dominion machines. She stated the country was a republic and not the "mob rule" of democracy. She stated that the country was not a democracy, which was a misconception heard in the media. She wondered why hunting and fishing licenses were removed from the beginning of the bill. She found page 3 of the bill confusing. She thought voting rolls needed to be cleaned up and cited 20,000 votes that were returned due to invalid addresses in the past election.

[2:40:07 PM](#)

SAMI GRAHAM, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), was opposed to the bill. She thought the bill was harmful and would completely change elections in Alaska. She believed it negatively impacted Alaskans serving in the military and military family members who wanted to return to Alaska. She did not support same day voter registration with zero time to verify eligibility. She thought the bill was a runway for future statewide mail-in voting with signature verification, vote curing, ballot drop boxes, ballot harvesting, and fraud. She stated that the bill removed the witness signature requirement, and she thought anyone could send in an absentee ballot they harvested. She did not think it made sense to require signatures for PFDs but not for voting. She thought the changes added expense and confusion. She stressed that there were many ways to improve elections, but the bill did not make improvements. She thought it lessened voter confidence.

[2:42:41 PM](#)

MIKE COONS, SELF, WASILLA (via teleconference), was in opposition to the bill. He stated that the Senate minority was not supportive of the bill. He did not support the removal of witness signatures. He stated there was a problem with election fraud. He stated there was no reason residents in small villages could not get a witness signature. He thought that supporting signatures had been called racist, which he believed was offensive and racist. He believed curing ballots was questionable. He stated that no voter identification was a violation of a recent executive order by President Trump for all federal elections. He referenced other election reform legislation offered by Senator Shower and Senator Hughes in the past that had few hearings. He thought the bill sponsor was notorious for offering legislation that was hard to understand. He opposed the bill.

Co-Chair Foster provided the email address for written testimony.

[2:46:04 PM](#)

KIRSTEN GERBATSCH, ATTORNEY, NATIVE AMERICAN RIGHTS FUND, COPPER CENTER (via teleconference), testified in support of the bill on behalf of the Native American Rights Fund. First, she stated that the witness signature requirement

served no legitimate purpose for ensuring election integrity. She detailed that in the 2020 case, Arctic Village v Meyer, the state's superior court ruled that the witness signature requirement burdened the right to vote during the COVID-19 pandemic and played no role in the detection of voter fraud. She noted the ruling had been affirmed by the state supreme court. Second, the ballot curing process would allow the Division of Elections to notify voters of clerical errors and would give voters the opportunity to correct errors on rejected ballots. She explained that ballots were most often rejected because of envelope deficiencies that could have been corrected if the division had timely informed voters of small defects. She relayed that the proposed ballot curing process in the bill ensured Alaska Native and rural voters could meaningfully exercise their right to vote absentee. Third, the bill added tribal IDs to the list of acceptable IDs for voting and voter registration. The Division of Elections accepted tribal IDs, but codifying it as a state law was an important step to provide certainty and address identification related barriers. She urged the committee to pass the bill.

[2:48:21 PM](#)

MARGE STONEKING, ADVOCACY DIRECTOR, AARP ALASKA, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), stated that AARP had a long history of advocating for fair and straightforward election procedures that help increase the participation of voters over the age of 50. She detailed that voters over the age of 50 consistently voted at higher rates than any other age group. She provided additional detail about the organization. She explained that AARP had heard complaints about absentee ballot requirements for witness signature from seniors living alone and rejection of absentee ballots with the inability to fix the error. The organization supported election laws that maximize the opportunity for voter participation. They wanted voters to have the ability to vote in the manner they chose and supported the removal of unnecessary barriers in the voting system. The organization strongly supported provisions in SB 64 to remove barriers and increase voter access, including preventing special needs ballots from being rejected, removing the written signature requirement for absentee ballots, creating a curing process for voters to fix errors if absentee ballots were rejected. The organization

supported providing secure drop boxes and prepaid postage on absentee ballots.

Representative Allard was leaning towards agreeing about the witness signature because she believed the state needed to enforce the ability to verify a voter's signature. She asked if AARP agreed that the identification for individuals should be a government issued photo ID card to include a BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs].

Ms. Stoneking responded that AARP supported the update included in the bill to add tribal identification. She asked if that was Representative Allard's question.

Representative Allard clarified she was asking whether AARP believed there should be a requirement for voters to show a government issued photo ID card.

Ms. Stoneking responded that she had not seen any changes regarding that topic in the bill; therefore, AARP had not analyzed it at present.

Representative Allard stated it meant that someone could vote by using a recent utility bill. She asked if Ms. Stoneking agreed that the document should be sufficient for a person to vote.

Ms. Stoneking replied that it was not a piece of the bill AARP analyzed.

Representative Allard reiterated her question.

Ms. Stoneking responded that she would have to look into the issue further because it was not something AARP had analyzed.

Representative Allard stated that currently individuals over the age of 50 did not have to have a government issued photo ID. Individuals were able to use a utility bill received within the past 60 days as a form of identification. She asked if Ms. Stoneking agreed or disagreed with the current law.

Ms. Stoneking responded that she worked on advocacy policy in Alaska on a broad array of issues. She was not the national government affairs expert on all things election. There were no specific changes on the topic under the bill;

therefore, she did not analyze or review AARP's policy on the topic.

[2:53:51 PM](#)

MICHAEL JONES, SELF, HOMER (via teleconference), opposed the bill. He was speaking on behalf of the nonprofit Alaskans for Transparent Government. He stated there was a fundamental flaw in the bill that needed to be addressed. He detailed that the Department of Administration oversight and review unit published a report titled "Review and Effectiveness of Security of the Division of Elections in Administering Alaska's Elections," dated July 13, 2020. He stated the report included many redacted flaws in the state's election process and redacted recommendations to improve election security and efficiency. He stated that two presidential elections had taken place following the publication of the report, yet the public had no greater insights on what the report said. He did not believe the bill should pass from the committee until a complete and transparent hearing on the oversight and review unit took place. Additionally, he believed the bill should include a complete reconciliation with the report to denote which items in the bill were responsive to the report and which items of the report were excluded. He thanked the committee.

[2:56:06 PM](#)

GERALD VOSS, SELF, JUNEAU (via teleconference), testified in opposition to the bill. He agreed there should be voter ID, but he pointed out that voter ID registration cards included no voter ID. He suggested the cards could be eliminated and individuals could use their driver's licenses as ID. He suggested the elimination of voter ID cards would save the state a substantial amount of money. He listed state IDs and tribal IDs as alternate options. He voted regularly using his hunting, fishing, and trapping license and it included no ID other than a purchase date. He remarked that his Costco card included more information. He thought perhaps the state should take a note from Costco on how to handle elections because Costco required ID to enter the store. He did not believe the state should pay for ballot postage. He asked how many people on public assistance were not U.S. citizens. He remarked that the bill allowed individuals on public assistance to vote with some form of related document.

[2:58:49 PM](#)

RITA TROMETTER, SELF, NORTH POLE (via teleconference), spoke against the bill. She shared that she had been an election watcher in the past. She understood the bill did not address Dominion machines, but she believed it needed to be addressed. She noted that drop boxes were addressed under Section 41 of the bill. She believed voters needed to be registered to vote prior to election day and needed a voter ID. She did not support the ability to use a hunting/fishing ID or a utility bill as a form of identification. She thought all absentee ballots should be received by election day and should require a witness signature. She stated that one person could only witness a certain number of ballots. She supported the ability for individuals to track their own ballots. She thought APOC needed to make it easier for the average individual to fill out the forms and to eliminate duplicate information. She believed there was great confusion with APOC so that some people could be charged large amounts of money for infractions. She thought it was a way for the state to get extra money. She talked about image enhancing advertising for individuals running for office. She discussed campaign signage and size requirements.

[3:05:09 PM](#)

Representative Stapp appreciated hearing from Ms. Trometter.

[3:05:41 PM](#)

KELLY NASH, FOUNDER, INTERIOR PATRIOTS, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to the bill. She believed the bill contained provisions that would jeopardize election security and the fundamental freedom of Alaskans. She stated that mass mailout ballots undermine security. She elaborated that the bill allowed absentee ballots to be automatically mailed to voters annually without request. She stated that it increased the risk of ballots going to the wrong people, especially with inaccurate voter rolls. She stated that the bill allowed voters to use utility bills or bank statements as forms of identification. She thought a valid driver's license should be required. She did not support the removal of a witness signature. She remarked that other states used the

signature on their government issued ID. She spoke about illegal ballot harvesting and ballot tampering. She thought ballot drop boxes created vulnerabilities. She listed additional reasons she opposed the bill. She urged the committee to vote no.

Representative Tomaszewski asked Ms. Nash to email her remarks to the House Finance Committee.

Ms. Nash replied that she had emailed her testimony.

[3:11:01 PM](#)

BERNIE HOFFMAN, SELF, FAIRBANKS (via teleconference), urged support for the bill. She stated that the bill would increase accessibility for all Alaskans. She supported Alaska's ranked choice voting. She remarked that ranked choice voting had been successful as there were a large group of legislators working together to solve issues facing Alaskans. She advocated for the removal of the witness signature provision. She shared that as a recent UPS window clerk she had customers ask her to sign their mail in ballots as a witness, but her management told her she could not sign the form. She stated that the requirement disenfranchised people who were trying to send their ballots in. She highlighted that one to two votes could make a difference in an election. She asked the committee to advance the bill in order for Alaskans to have their votes counted.

[3:13:35 PM](#)

JAMIE DONLEY, SELF, EAGLE RIVER (via teleconference), opposed the bill. She referred to earlier comment that some people in remote villages did not know an election was taking place. She remarked that she had knocked on doors throughout Alaska and many people in Anchorage did not know when it was time to vote. She thought the bill tried to take away the integrity of "our vote" so that people who chose not to vote had a better opportunity to choose not to vote. She thought it was a bad reason to pass horrible legislation. She believed the bill would result in ballot harvesting. She thought the bill took a system that needed to be fixed and made it worse. She had lived in a village as a child and she remarked that there were many people who voted and many people who chose not to vote, which was their decision. She did not believe it was a good idea to

change laws to make it easier for ballot fraud and to push people into voting who did not want to vote and were not engaging in the system. She stated she received multiple ballots at her address with other people's names on them. She elaborated that after complaining, the ballots still came to her house. She was very concerned about ballot harvesting. She thought the bill was terrible.

[3:15:58 PM](#)

BARBARA HANEY, SELF, NORTH POLE (via teleconference), noted she would submit written comments as well. She found several provisions of the bill to be very problematic, and she hoped the committee would vote against it. She did not support the elimination of the witness signature on absentee ballots. She shared that she is 65 and stressed that older people had IDs. She stated they get upset when they see people voting without photo identification. She remarked that it had been a traditional norm that needed to be maintained. She suggested having individual's print their name in addition to providing a witness signature. She noted there was a new generation of election judges who could not read cursive. She was strongly opposed page 30, line 6 of the bill implementing a restriction on the size of political signs to 32 square feet. The current restriction was 66 square feet. She thought it was wrong to reduce the size. She noted that large signs showed the election date and informed the public. She objected to a provision pertaining to synthetic media. She provided details of a past event.

[3:21:00 PM](#)

Representative Tomaszewski asked Ms. Haney to email her testimony.

Ms. Haney would do so.

[3:21:23 PM](#)

DONALD THOMPSON, SELF, NORTH POLE (via teleconference), strongly opposed the bill for several reasons. He supported witness signatures and identification. He supported requiring photo identification for voters. He spoke to the need to secure elections. He stated that the bill advocated for extensive alcohol and naked dancing signs, but limited people from telling people what they could do to help the

state and country. He thought the bill needed to be shut down. He did not believe it contained anything positive for voters. He was opposed to sign limits and mail in ballots. He stated that if mail in ballots were allowed, they should have to be received by the election day. He thought it was ridiculous for Alaska to take a month to determine who won. He did not support ranked choice voting. He advocated getting rid of California and its influence in Alaska.

[3:23:59 PM](#)

KRISTEEN F PETERSON, SELF, JUNEAU (via teleconference), supported the bill. She liked the idea of state ID and tribal ID. She suggested having the Department of Revenue Permanent Fund Dividend Division share data to assist after processing. She suggested that if amendments needed to be made, they should be made to the bill instead of throwing it out and starting over.

[3:25:20 PM](#)

RAY KREIG, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in opposition to the bill. He did not support removing the signature from ballot envelopes for mail in voting. He thought it looked like an attempt to establish permanent absentee by mail ballot distribution similar to the system for the Municipality of Anchorage.

Co-Chair Foster asked for verification that Mr. Kreig was testifying on his own behalf.

Mr. Kreig agreed.

[3:26:50 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster relayed that there were no additional testifiers. He would leave public testimony open.

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

[Note: the bill was taken up again later in the meeting at 6:45 p.m.]

[3:28:02 PM](#)

AT EASE

[3:46:22 PM](#)  
RECONVENED

#sb39

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 39 (FIN)

"An Act relating to loans in an amount of \$25,000 or less; relating to financial institutions; relating to the Nationwide Multistate Licensing System and Registry; relating to pawnbroker licensing exemptions; relating to deferred deposit advances; relating to computing interest; and providing for an effective date."

[3:47:03 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster OPENED public testimony. He provided the email address for public testimony. He noted there were eight individuals online to testify.

[3:48:12 PM](#)

NATALIE LYNCH, INNOVATIVE LENDING PLATFORM ASSOCIATION (ILPA), WASHINGTON, DC (via teleconference), explained that ILPA was a trade organization for online lenders and service companies serving small businesses. She stated that the bill went far beyond the sponsor's intent of regulating payday loans. She believed it would negatively impact small business in Alaska relying on diverse financing options to meet credit needs. She elaborated that Alaska would be the fourth state to adopt such a broad regulation. She remarked that laws in other states were narrowly tailored to small consumer loans. She stated that the law would apply to any loan of \$25,000 or less, not just payday loans. She noted that the average payday loan an Alaska borrower took out was \$440. She stated that the bill would severely hurt ILPA members' ability to supply working capital to Alaska's small businesses. The bill would also require anyone holding the predominate economic interest in the loans to be registered in Alaska. She stated that transferring loans to nonbank entities was a fundamental aspect of banking that helped reduce risk. She highlighted that it could also lead to higher borrowing cost and less capital available for Alaskan consumers. She added that the bill would endanger the secondary credit market. The organization opposed the bill.

[3:50:36 PM](#)

CATHY BRENNAN, PARTNER, HUDSON COOK LAW FIRM, BALTIMORE, MD (via teleconference), shared that the firm represented banks and fintechs [financial technology] with regard to consumer financial services laws and regulation. Her focus was on bank partnerships. She addressed the bill's provision that recharacterized the bank's service provider as the true lender on credit transactions. She stated that the Small Loans Act (SLA) provided an optional licensing scheme allowing licensed nonbank lenders to contract for a greater rate of interest than the rate available to unlicensed lenders. She relayed that currently the SLA did not require entities that brokered, serviced, or purchased consumer loans to obtain a license. She stated that unfortunately the bill would impair highly regulated U.S. banks from making legal loans to Alaskans. She relayed that fintech service providers were subject to a high level of scrutiny from banks and regulators. She provided an example. Federal law authorized federal and state banks to export interest rates from their home states to make loans to borrowers across state lines and allowed banks to work with third parties in the loan making process. She stated that the anti-evasion language in the bill ignored the reality that banks managed their balance sheets by routinely selling the loans they originated. She provided an example. She stated that the bill impaired the common practice and would diminish the availability of consumer credit in the state. She highlighted that the bill included commercial lending, which she imagined was likely not the intent of the bill.

Representative Hannan asked where the anti-evasion language Ms. Brennan was referring to was located in the bill.

Ms. Brennan responded that the bill would add a new subsection to Section 4 [subsection (c)(1)] under AS 6.20.010. She read language from the subsection: "...directly or indirectly holds, acquires, or maintains the 21 predominant economic interest in a loan..." She noted there was additional language regarding evasion.

Representative Hannan observed that Ms. Lynch and Ms. Brennan came from a similar segment of industry. She remarked that there were not many reasons in most elected officials' minds not to help protect consumers from predatory lending practices of payday lenders. She remarked

that Ms. Lynch asserted the entire bill should be stopped. She wondered if Ms. Brennan had concerns about the payday lending portions of the bill separate from the SLA portions. She asked if Ms. Brennan's concerns were exclusive to Section 4 and the anti-evasion language.

Ms. Brennan responded that her process was focused on working with banks attempting to offer credit on a nationwide basis, which was done with the assistance of service providers frequently referred to as fintechs. She was concerned the legislation would impair the ability of banks to exercise their lawful authority under federal law and the law of their home state. She was most concerned about the bank partnership. Secondly, the bill would limit the ability of commercial entities and businesses in Alaska to get credit through a bank partnership program. She explained that it was common for that type of credit for interest rates to be higher than it would be for consumer credit given the nature of the underwriting and type of loans. She did not know that she would refer to that market as predatory. Additionally, on the consumer side, there were many consumers who were credit impaired, who would not qualify for other types of credit. She understood policymakers needed to make a policy decision on how to protect consumers. She suggested the legislation would not protect consumers, but it would hurt them by making it difficult to get credit.

[3:57:12 PM](#)

Representative Hannan asked if Ms. Brennan's use of the word "consumer" meant a commercial entity or an individual.

Ms. Brennan clarified that a consumer was an individual who obtained credit for a household or personal use.

Representative Hannan stated most legislators were interested in providing more protections for consumers using payday loans. She noted that Ms. Brennan had first talked about Section 4 related to commercial lending. She elaborated that Ms. Brennan had also stated the bill would lose credit for consumers. She had initially thought the commercial credit was only available to commercial entities. She thought she understood Ms. Brennan's concerns.

Ms. Brennan responded that the SLA was an optional scheme. She explained that that many small loan acts in many states including Alaska, did not specifically apply only to consumer credit; therefore, it was broad enough to apply to consumer and commercial credit made to individuals (sole proprietors or individuals who own a business). She asked if her explanation made sense.

Representative Hannan agreed.

3:59:20 PM

REVERAND ANDY BARTEL, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), shared that he had been a resident and safe leader in Anchorage for the past decade. He testified in favor of SB 39. He detailed that for two years, the Alaska Conference of the United Methodist Church, had unanimously adopted a resolution in support of payday lending reform. He noted that a unanimous vote in the church was about as rare as a unanimous vote in the legislature. He highlighted that church members were republicans, democrats, and independents and the bill did not favor a particular political perspective. The church believed financial institutions served a vital role in society, but they must guard against abuses and deceptive lending practices that took advantage of the neediest for the gain of the richest. He underscored that banking regulations must prevent the collection of usurious interest that kept people in cycles of debt. He stressed that payday lending in Alaska was predatory lending extracting millions of dollars from local impoverished citizens and the local economy. He stated that short term loans by payday lenders were not the only option for some individuals. He listed Credit Union One, Spirit of Alaska Credit Union, Wells Fargo as options for small dollar short-term loan products that came in under the proposed 36 percent cap. Prior to returning to Alaska, he had been a pastor in South Dakota, which also enacted a similar cap to reform payday lending. He highlighted that subsequent studies showed the economy had only benefitted from enacting a 36 percent cap on all lenders. He pointed out that South Dakota had saved \$81 million a year in fees. He underscored that the bill would make a real and positive difference for some of the state's most vulnerable Alaskans. He implored the committee to pass the legislation. He thanked the committee.

4:02:43 PM

GREG PORTER, ONLINE LENDER'S ALLIANCE, ARLINGTON, VA (via teleconference), shared that the organization had submitted written testimony as well. The alliance focused on policy surrounding credit access and believed that more options yielded better outcomes for consumers. He stated there had been a lot of discussion on payday products, but there was much more in the bill that would impact access to credit for consumers and small businesses. He detailed that nearly one-third of Alaskans were considered credit constrained and Alaskans led the nation in credit card utilization and had the highest card balances in the U.S. He disputed claims that lenders would keep making loans to the same borrowers at lower cost if the bill was enacted. He stated that if someone needed a couple hundred dollars until their next paycheck, a lender could charge \$1.50 per week in total fees and interest. He remarked that common sense suggested that small dollar lenders would not be able to adequately price for cost or risk and borrowers would see options dry up. He highlighted there was research from the federal reserve backing up his statement.

Mr. Porter reported that Illinois applied the same framework of restrictions as SB 39 and a study showed that credit access declined for thousands of consumers after the restrictions were enacted. He referenced some proponents claims that large legacy banks and credit unions offered small dollar loans. He stated it was technically true, but for a small number of individuals. He stated the offerings did not come close to meeting demand. The bill worked against more banks entering into the small dollar space. He explained that states had the ability to extend loans across state lines and used the assistance of service providers. He stated that the bill worked to stop banks from offering loans if they worked with a service provider. He pointed out that when people lost the ability to access products to support themselves in a downturn, they were more likely to turn to government support. He stated that on a per capita basis, Alaska ranked near the top on public support payments. He believed the bill would increase the need. He urged the committee to oppose the bill.

[4:06:14 PM](#)

AT EASE

[4:06:43 PM](#)

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[4:06:54 PM](#)

MIKE COONS, SELF, WASILLA (via teleconference), opposed the bill. He stated that the bill was not about poor people only. He thought the bill boiled down to the government getting involved in people's mistakes, while government could not control its spending and borrowing from the Permanent Fund Dividend. He remarked that the mistakes were in many cases due to poor education and impulse buying. He suggested that it did not matter if interest rates were 194 to 521 percent or general lending laws of 39 percent. He stated that people got into debt and stayed in debt. He read from the last paragraph of the sponsor statement. He asked what constituted reasonable interest rates. He wondered if it was 12, 25, or 39 percent. He relayed the Discover credit cards had a rate of 18.24 to 27.24 percent. He stated that people were getting payday loans because banks would not take the risk. He suggested that the legislature should go after credit card companies that allowed multiple credit cards when a person was heavily in debt. He stated the no amount of government help would fix the problem. He underscored that the key was teaching kids responsible financial management. He believed there should be classes taught on the subject. He was in support of separate legislation that taught financial literacy.

[4:09:46 PM](#)

WENDY GIBSON, CHECK CITY, PROVO, UT (via teleconference), testified in opposition to the bill. She shared that she is an Alaska licensed payday lender located in Provo, Utah. She stated that although SB 39 was a consumer friendly bill to reduce the cost associated with short-term loans, its passage amounted to a wholesale prohibition of licensed short-term lending in Alaska. She highlighted that if the bill passed, the only entities that would offer loans were those with no regard for Alaska law. She believed Alaskans would face fewer choices, higher risk, and greater financial hardship. She stated that customers deserved access to credit that was transparent, safe, and regulated. The company charged a flat fee, did not charge interest, and its loans were capped at \$500. The company was also subject to strict money rules in Alaska including offering a repayment plan if customers were unable to pay by the due date. She stated that in the past year, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau had received only one complaint

against an Alaska payday lender. She stated that the statute had worked well for years. She emphasized that the bill was not data driven and did not include input from all stakeholders. She thought the bill would unintentionally harm people it was trying to protect. She asked the committee to vote against the bill.

[4:12:16 PM](#)

KAY WRIGHT, SELF, NIKISKI (via teleconference), was in opposition to the bill. He stated that short-term loans were a priority for some village residents trying to stretch finances from paycheck to paycheck. He thought the bill should allow short-term loans to continue. He remarked that it was sad when a person could not get a loan from a bank in a remote area.

[4:13:26 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster shared that he would keep public testimony open for the time being. He provided the email address for written testimony.

[Note: Co-Chair Foster closed public testimony later in the meeting at 4:31 p.m.]

[4:14:23 PM](#)

SENATOR FORREST DUNBAR, SPONSOR, addressed the idea that there was something unique or different about the anti-evasion provision. There was written testimony from the Center for Responsible Lending in members' bill packets written by Mr. Kushner that included a section addressing the topic. He elaborated that it had to do with the service provider issue Mr. Kushner had spoken about. He highlighted that it was not a novel language; the language was identical or near identical to language adopted in Maine, New Mexico, Washington, Connecticut, and Illinois. He noted the language had not been repealed in any of those locations or overturned by a federal lawsuit. He clarified that the bill did not include a novel expansion and included standard anti-evasion language.

Co-Chair Foster set an amendment deadline for Saturday at 5:00 p.m.

CSSB 39(FIN) was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

[4:15:44 PM](#)

#hb52

HOUSE BILL NO. 52

"An Act relating to the rights of minors undergoing evaluation or inpatient treatment at psychiatric hospitals; relating to the use of seclusion or restraint of minors at psychiatric hospitals; relating to a report published by the Department of Health; relating to inspections by the Department of Health of certain psychiatric hospitals; and providing for an effective date."

[4:16:46 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MAXINE DIBERT, SPONSOR, thanked her staff for their work on the bill. She relayed that the bill focused on improving child psychiatric care in Alaska. She expressed gratitude to the committee for hearing the legislation. The bill was designed to better protect children receiving care in psychiatric care hospitals in Alaska by reinforcing parental rights and increasing transparency during treatment. The bill accomplished the goals through three straightforward reforms.

Representative Dibert reviewed the three steps the state could take to protect its most vulnerable citizens. First, the bill expanded the rights of parents and guardians to communicate with their children while they were receiving psychiatric care. The bill ensured regular access to telephone and video communication. She relayed that many of the children were placed in facilities hundreds of miles from their homes and maintaining connection was critical to their wellbeing. She stated that in a previous hearing the committee heard directly from former patients who were now adults who shared that as children, they went months without any contact with their guardians despite repeated requests. She underscored that a lot of work was needed and the situation was unacceptable.

Representative Dibert addressed the second action taken by the bill. The legislation required unannounced thorough inspections of the facilities to be done by state public

health officials. Currently, inspections took place only once every 36 months. The gap had allowed some facilities to fall short of the standard of care children deserved. Reports of neglect, abuse, and sexual assault made it clear the state was not doing enough and it was their duty to ensure children were protected. Third, the bill brought much needed transparency to the use of all forms of restraint in psychiatric hospitals including chemical restraints. The bill defined the practices clearly in statute and required detailed documentation of their use, along with the use of physical restraint and seclusion. She shared that a lot of work had been done in the House Health and Social Services Committee to help with the specific section. She explained that with the rising rates of restraint used in psychiatric hospitals, there were serious concerns that measures were being misused to punish patients rather than to treat them, ultimately harming a child's ability to heal and reintegrate into their communities. She stressed that a youth should never come out of treatment worse than when they entered. She stated that the bill was not a silver bullet, but it was an important first step bringing Alaska closer to compliance and paving the way for better outcomes for children in psychiatric care. She requested to hear the sectional analysis from her staff.

Co-Chair Foster noted that people had been waiting for some time for public testimony so he would move to that first.

Representative Dibert noted there should be a second [invited] testifier online. She noted that Ben Mallot with the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) should be available.

Co-Chair Foster confirmed that Mr. Mallot was online. He moved to invited testimony.

[4:22:19 PM](#)

MATEO JAIME, COMMUNITY RELATIONS LIAISON, FACING FOSTER CARE, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), shared that he entered foster care when he was 15 in 2017 and made his way from Texas to Alaska because of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). He shared that he had switched placement due to rampant abuse. There had been no foster homes in Anchorage; therefore, his caseworker sent him to North Star [Behavioral Health System]. He explained that the entry process had been very difficult, and he was not allowed to

have his own clothes. The doctor told him he would be there for two weeks, which turned into two months. He shared that he witnessed a lot of medical abuse during his time at North Star, including staff that physically attacked patients who were much smaller. He detailed that "so called" therapy sessions involved North Star trying to send patients to long-term out-of-state facilities. He relayed that the facility did not listen or help patients learn how to navigate their issues. He shared that he did not have any mental health issues, despite going through long-term trauma. He explained that staff at North Star tried to put him on medications even though he did not need them. He provided additional testimony [indecipherable due to poor audio]. He stressed the importance of transparency in psychiatric institutions. He thanked the committee for the time to speak.

Representative Hannan asked if Mr. Jaime graduated from the University of Alaska the previous week with honors.

Mr. Jaime responded affirmatively. He shared that he graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in legal studies.

Representative Hannan replied that it had been a privilege to see Mr. Jaime's growth and maturity over the past several years. She wished him the best and thanked him for testifying.

[4:26:08 PM](#)

BENJAMIN MALLOTT, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), shared information about AFN. He thanked Representative Dibert for her leadership on the bill. He congratulated Mr. Jaime on his graduation and wished him the best of luck. He relayed that AFN supported the bill for many reasons. First, rural Alaska mental healthcare was very limited for options. Most often when youth were in mental crisis they were sent to facilities that were far from home. The bill would allow more access for parents and/or families to contact children in distress or in facilities. The bill also allowed the state to have better care and management of the facilities including two annual unannounced inspections. The bill provided more transparency in the use of sometimes very traumatizing restraints for youth in facilities. Overall, the bill was a

step in the right direction for the care of youth in facilities. He thanked Representative Dibert for her leadership ensuring youth had the access to care they deserved. He thanked the committee, Gunalchéesh.

[4:28:31 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster OPENED public testimony.

[4:28:53 PM](#)

STEVEN PEARCE, DIRECTOR, CITIZENS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, SEATTLE (via teleconference), shared that the commission is a psychiatric watchdog organization. The commission supported the bill. The organization believed the reforms the bill brought to reduce abuse, strengthen family connections, and improve transparency of Alaska psychiatric hospitals was a move in the right direction. He referenced a recommendation by the Disability Law Center about reviewing the current approach using powerful, mind altering psychiatric drugs by moving to a new focus of treatment in providing a noncoercive drug-free approach to move youth towards recovery of health. He underscored that psychiatric drugs were not cures and they often led to long-term disability. He stated that the bill addressed some of the issue of treating youth better, but involuntary treatment for youth must evolve beyond being a chemical restraint or deterrent for youth in emotional crisis. He stated that testimony clearly showed that people were not treated with respect and dignity that should have been provided. The organization urged that the bill should go further and suggested language specifying that patients had the right to be treated with dignity as a human being. He reiterated support for the bill.

[4:31:00 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster CLOSED public testimony for HB 52.

Co-Chair Foster CLOSED public testimony for SB 39.

Co-Chair Foster asked for a review of the fiscal notes for HB 52.

[4:31:52 PM](#)

BRODIE ANDERSON, STAFF, REPRESENTATIVE NEAL FOSTER, reviewed the zero fiscal note from Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS), OMB component 3314, control code JbxmK. The department specified in the note that it could provide the necessary data with no fiscal impact. The second zero fiscal note was from DFCS, OMB component 3321, Odoim. The data to be collected and tracked would come at no additional cost to the department. The third fiscal note was from the Department of Health, OMB component 2944, control code Otlxn. The fiscal note included an FY 26 cost of \$172,100 in personal services, \$35,000 services, and \$5,000 in commodities, for a total operating cost of \$212,100 in unrestricted general funds for a full-time position. The department would also be required to do some regulation review. He provided a cost breakdown including one new nurse consultant 1 position, annual services of \$20,000 for office space, phone number, and reimbursable services, and \$15,000 for two annual trainings for the position. Additional costs were \$2,000 for office supplies and a one-time commodity cost of \$3,000 in FY 26.

[4:35:11 PM](#)

Co-Chair Josephson asked how the communication feature would be applied if a youth was transferred out of state to Utah for example.

Representative Dibert replied that the bill only focused on youth in Alaska. She hoped that further legislation in the future could help with youth who were out of state.

Co-Chair Josephson asked if Representative Andrew Gray had a similar bill.

Representative Dibert agreed that Representative Gray had a similar bill. She deferred the question to her staff for detail.

[4:36:36 PM](#)

MATTIE HULL, STAFF, REPRESENTATIVE MAXINE DIBERT, responded that the bill submitted by Representative Gray interacted with foster care populations. He relayed that of the 213 applicable Medicaid psychiatric patients, 66 were in foster care. He explained that it was a different population. The bill helped many [youth] that were in foster care, but it pertained to psychiatric children and not foster children.

Representative Bynum observed the bill was written so the minor in care had the right to the communications aspect. He wondered if there was something that protected the parent's right to communicate with the minor in care. He did not see it in the bill and wondered if it was already established in law.

Mr. Hull answered that he was not aware of anything in statute. The bill would establish the right for a parent to create a request for communication. He noted that he may be incorrect.

Representative Bynum asked where the information was located in statute or within the bill. He was amenable to receiving the response at a later time if needed.

Mr. Hull responded that Section 1 on page 2 established that the minor's parent or legal guardian or another adult approved by the person in charge may request the confidential communication. He noted that the language had been added in the bill.

Representative Bynum asked Mr. Hull to repeat the section and location in the bill.

Mr. Hull answered that the language was on Section 1, page 2, line 1 of the bill. He restated the bill language.

Representative Bynum observed that page 1 of the bill stated that a minor had the right unless prohibited by a court order or law to have confidential communication. He thought page 2 made it sound like a parent had to request to have the confidential communication. He wanted to ensure the parent had the right to confidential communication. He was amenable to receiving clarification on his question at a later time.

[4:40:37 PM](#)

Representative Hannan asked for verification the bill would impact two hospitals including Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) and a private hospital. She believed they were the only two hospitals currently treating minors in closed custody psychiatric care.

Representative Dibert replied affirmatively.

Representative Hannan asked if the sponsor had explored making the bill slightly broader to include hospitals with closed psychiatric units. She wondered whether they had been excluded because they did not take kids for the long-term or if there was another legal reason.

Representative Dibert responded that the bill focused on psychiatric hospitals and she had not looked into expanding beyond that. She thought it was something to be explored as legislators learned more on how to help youth in the facilities. She appreciated the thought.

Representative Hannan stressed the importance of the bill. She wanted to ensure they were capturing as many circumstances as possible where kids would be impacted. She considered it may be that the state licensure of treatment facilities could cover it in regulatory processes versus statute. She referenced separate legislation that would stand up alternative treatment facilities like group homes. She noted the bill had not yet passed and regulations had not been written. She wanted to ensure the same legal protections in HB 52 would be applied to any additional facilities that may open in the future. She noted she was jumping ahead to the vision where there would be treatment facilities to bring home kids who were currently not able to be treated in Alaska.

Representative Dibert replied that she appreciated Representative Hannan's remarks. She requested to hear a response from the Department of Health.

[4:44:07 PM](#)

ROBERT NAVE, DIVISION OPERATIONS MANAGER, DIVISION OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (via teleconference), stated his understanding that the initial reason for the bill focusing solely on psychiatric hospitals was due to findings in a Department of Justice report on Alaska. He relayed that it would be possible to look into expansion if it was needed in the future and it may require an additional fiscal note.

Representative Bynum stated that Section 4 of the bill addressed the right to have access to inspections and set standards for interviews of patients [50 percent of patients], and the number of times inspections could occur.

He asked if there was an established guideline that informed the specific portion of the bill. Alternatively, he wondered if the language had been selected because it had been determined to be a good thing to do.

Mr. Hull responded that the origin of the number came from other states that had instituted the requirement. He believed 30 other states had implemented some form of instate inspection. The 50 percent originated from Montana and a number of states had stepped up to ensure instate child psychiatric standards of care were rising.

Representative Bynum highlighted that the fiscal note added personnel to the Department of Health (DOH). He observed there would be an elevated need in order to fulfil the requirements of the law. He wondered if there would be any negative impact if the department was unable to hire for the position.

Mr. Nave responded that currently the Health Care Facility Licensing and Certification program was at critical mass with regard the current need and staffing. He stated that if the department was unable to hire the new position, it would be difficult to impossible to meet the requirements of the bill.

Representative Bynum surmised that language in Section 4 provided the right for DOH to perform the activities, but it would not necessarily mean the state would be in breach of law or requirement if it was unable to fulfil two [inspections] per year and [interview] 50 percent [of the minor patients in a facility]. He asked if his understanding was accurate.

Mr. Hull responded that to his knowledge there was no punishment language for not fulfilling the items [set out in Section 4 of the bill].

[4:48:34 PM](#)

Representative Dibert added that if there was a body to collect data from the institutions, there would be a report which would be provided to the legislature at the end of the year. She explained that it could provide information on the transparency of the system in the state. She remarked that if there was no one providing the data, a substantial amount of work was needed in the area.

Representative Bynum supported the language in Section 4, specifically the requirement for unannounced inspections. He noted that hospitals had requirements where a survey was done, which was usually unannounced at least once a year. He pointed out that the language used in the bill stated DOH shall do the work. His only concern was about the state's ability to fill positions, and he thought the position under the bill would require technical competencies that may be difficult. He wanted to make sure it did not result in a noncompliant situation that may put the state in jeopardy.

[4:50:09 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster noted that he intended to take a recess for dinner.

Representative Jimmie highlighted that traveling from rural Alaska to urban areas was extremely hard on a child. She believed the inability for a child to communicate with their parents would contribute to a worsening of the child's condition.

Representative Dibert appreciated the comments from Representative Jimmie. She agreed that children were being sent far from home and the bill was aiming to protect them. She thanked Representative Jimmie, Enaa baasee'.

Co-Chair Foster set an amendment deadline for Friday, May 16 at 5:00 p.m.

HB 52 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

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RECESSED

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RECONVENED

#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."

[6:46:03 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster noted the committee would return to SB 64.

Mr. Dunsmore resumed a PowerPoint presentation that had been previously heard by the committee titled "SB 64 Election Reform," updated on May 15, 2025 (copy on file). He began on slide 18 read from the slide:

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

Mr. Dunsmore turned to slide 19 and detailed that the bill would create a ballot curing process to allow voters to correct technical mistakes that would otherwise result in the rejection of their ballots. The provision was originally included in bills introduced by Representative Schrage and Senator Mike Shower and possibly others.

Representative Allard stated that she had a problem with staff using the name of a member from the other body who she did not believe supported the bill. She did not believe it was appropriate for staff to continually say that the legislator supported the bill.

Co-Chair Schrage thought there was a request the prior day for Mr. Dunsmore to include the origin of items. He felt there were mixed messages on what committee members would like from staff.

Co-Chair Foster confirmed there had been a request [to hear the origin of items in the bill].

Co-Chair Schrage understood it was sometimes difficult to be staff and cater to the wishes of the committee and he thought the committee should be consistent in its requests.

Representative Allard thought staff had mentioned the [specific] legislators 22 to 23 times. She thought the legislators would likely come publicly testify during the meeting to explain where they stood on the issues. She did not believe legislators should be included in the conversation in a way that they may not be support.

Representative Galvin recalled hearing a request to be told who had mentioned a particular part of the elections bill whenever the reference was bipartisan. She knew there had been previous legislation put forward that had included some of the pieces included in SB 64. She understood why there may be reference to others.

Co-Chair Foster noted there had been a queue of questions from members from a previous meeting on the bill. He began with Representative Stapp.

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Representative Stapp suggested that perhaps the Senate minority leader should be asked to provide invited testimony. Separately, he had questions about the bill. He knew that Co-Chair Josephson had mentioned the bill was pro-military. He did not view the bill in that way. He thought the bill appeared to be against active duty military. He cited a provision on page 2 of the bill that included an existing exemption where an active duty military person did not lose their eligibility residency solely by reason of absence. However, he argued that added provisions likely would result in the individuals losing eligibility. One such provision pertained to establishing residency in another state. He moved to page 4 and cited provisions regarding registering a vehicle in another state and receiving a benefit available to a resident in another state. He shared that when he was in the Army he was sent to Texas where he had been required by law to register his vehicle within 30 days. He viewed the changes in the bill to mean a person would be violating their residency in Alaska by being forced by another state to register their vehicle within 30 days. Additionally, he cited a provision on page 4 that moved two general election cycles to 28 months. He relayed that most of his constituents on Fort

Wainwright tended to only vote in presidential elections. He stated that if the requirement went down to 28 months, he was concerned that most of those individuals, even if they were still living in Alaska, would be cleaned from the rolls because many of them did not apply for the Permanent Fund Dividend.

Mr. Dunsmore deferred the first part of the question to Sonja Kawasaki [majority counsel for the Senate]. He addressed the second part of the question. He clarified that the reference mentioned by Representative Stapp on page 5 of the bill was with regard to the voter roll cleanup sections, not for the residency requirement. He explained that the section contained indicators that someone may not be a resident that would trigger the process. The idea of crafting the language was to come up with triggers if someone claimed residency in another state. He stated that if the committee was opposed to the language, it was something that could potentially be amended. The change from two general election cycles to 28 months was a result of negotiations. He did not know if the committee wanted to hear which senator insisted on the change, but the senator was very effective in securing many conservative provisions "in this bipartisan election bill." He stated the individual had done a great job advancing conservative election policies through the Senate, whether he supported the bill or not. He detailed that there had been some concern that two general election cycles was not a specific time limit and the desire was to have a specific time limit. He elaborated that because the voter cleanup process occurred in January, the idea was that 28 months would cover the period between the past two general elections. He believed federal law included the language "two general elections" but negotiations in the Senate resulted in setting a specified period of time.

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Representative Stapp stated the two general elections would be 64 months (8 years). He was fine with setting a 28-month timeframe. He stated that about 800 ballots were questioned on Fort Wainwright because they were same-day registrations. He noted that military came up on a three to five-year cycle. He explained that the individuals registered the first time they went to vote because most of them were not filling out PFD applications and typically they only voted in a general election cycle. He highlighted

that the vote total in his district doubled between 2022 and 2024 due to the persistence of people going to vote. He stated his concern that the state would be looking to remove the individuals in the specified timeframe. He noted that one general election cycle would be 48 months, and 28 months would be not quite half.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that the current law for general election did not refer to a general election cycle, it referred to the general elections themselves. He explained it would be slightly more or less because elections did not fall on the same day of the year, but two general elections would happen approximately 24 months from each other.

Representative Stapp remarked that it was still not quite 50 percent less time.

Mr. Dunsmore answered that the sponsor would be happy to work with the committee on the specific provision.

Representative Stapp looked at page 2 that included an exemption for active duty military. He noted that the language specified that the person may not lose [the ability to vote in Alaska] by sole reasons of absence, which made sense to him. However, he believed the reasons listed in the subsequent subsections contradicted the provision. For example, when he had been transferred [in the Army] to Texas, he had been required by law to register his vehicle in Texas. Based on the language in the bill, he believed a person would be abdicating their Alaska residency for doing so.

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SONJA KAWASAKI, SENATE MAJORITY LEGAL COUNSEL, looked at Section 1 on page 2, lines 2 through 10 and explained that the section included factors that were indicative of whether a person had gained or lost residency in Alaska. The section included language that concerned whether a person had gained or lost residency for reasons listed in the provision. One of the factors was that a person may not be considered to have lost residency by being in active military service. The subsequent provisions that changed intent to return would not interfere with the current exemption for active duty military service and their spouses.

Representative Stapp read from lines 2 through 4 of page 2 of the bill "A person may not be considered to have gained a residence solely by reason of presence nor may a person lose it solely by reason of absence while in the civil or military service..." He stated that the way it had always worked was that if a person left Alaska because they received orders to go somewhere else, they did not lose residency. He looked at the added provisions related to establishing residency in another state. He highlighted that page 5 listed numerous things the state would do to start curing the votes including receiving a driver's license and registering a vehicle in another state. He understood the plain language on page 2 "solely by reason of absence." He listed additional actions on page 5 including receiving public assistance, serving on a jury, and receiving a hunting/fishing license in another state. He relayed that he had been required to do some of the things on the list by other states' law. He wanted to ensure a person would not inadvertently invalidate their voting rights in Alaska by doing those things.

[7:01:29 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore replied that the provisions in Section 5 related to voter roll cleanup were not things that automatically meant a person was not a resident. He explained that some of the items were meant to be indicators a person had claimed residency in another state. He explained that it would be the process triggering a voter roll cleanup notice. He explained that when a voter did not respond to the notice, they were moved to inactive status, where they would remain on inactive status for the next two general elections. If a person voted or requested an absentee ballot during that time period, their vote would be counted, and their registration would be reactivated. He clarified that the items triggered receiving a notice, but even if a person did not respond to the notice, their vote would be counted if they voted.

Representative Stapp highlighted that most of the people [active military] were voting in presidential elections every four years. He provided a scenario where a military member was transferred to Texas and the 28-month trigger occurred and the individual received a letter they had to respond to within 45 days. He asked how the state knew where a person lived. He pointed out that most of the individuals were not registering to vote via the PFD, they

were registering by filling out a question ballot to vote in a presidential election. He asked how the state knew the person was living in Texas.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that the notice would be sent to the mailing address on file with the Division of Elections and would be forwardable in compliance with the National Voter Registration Act. He added that if someone who intended to vote was inadvertently removed, they could request an absentee ballot, show up to vote in person, or contact the Division of Elections to reactivate their voter registration.

Co-Chair Schrage appreciated the line of questioning, but he thought it was confusing for the public trying to learn about the bill for the committee to be jumping around. He noted that the committee was now discussing page 6 [of the presentation]. He was trying to determine how to get through the sections of the bill to provide a high level overview. He thought the committee could scrutinize the sections more deeply after finishing an overview.

Representative Stapp stated he would defer to the slide deck. He remarked on the availability of time to go into depth on the bill.

[7:05:04 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster stated that he typically got through bill introductions in order to have the whole bill before the committee. He explained that questions had been asked, and it turned out the answer was shown on a later slide. He had been comfortable allowing questions throughout the presentation, given its large size, but he thought it may be better to get through the slide deck before going to more questions.

Co-Chair Schrage recognized the difficulty of being staff presenting to the committee and receiving conflicting requests from the committee. He requested to ask staff not to refer to where provisions had originated to avoid subjectivity.

Co-Chair Foster read a list of members with questions. He stated it was not customary, but not unheard of to have legislators come up for public testimony. He asked if

Senator Mike Shower or Representative Sarah Vance would like to come up to the table.

Representative Bynum remarked that earlier in the presentation there had been a lot of references to the senator from the other body and a member of the House. He believed he had asked to know where provisions had come from because there was a targeted effort to point out certain elements, which may sway him one way or another based on the information. He thought it may have been an error. He was comfortable with not mentioning members of the other body or their own body at all when the information was being presented. He suggested the committee could always ask the sponsor's staff to provide a list of different elements of the bill in the sectional analysis along with where the information may have come from.

[7:08:44 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster noted it was not customary to bring up legislators but it was not unheard of. He considered that because the legislators had been referred to numerous times, it had reached a point where some clarification could be provided on where the individuals stood on the bill. He would treat the comments as public testimony. He did not want there to be a back and forth discussion between the testifiers and the committee.

Representative Hannan stated her concern was they were still in the same situation where they had not gone through the basic slide deck. She thought it was premature to have other legislators come before the committee before finishing the presentation. She hoped to go through the slide deck first. She stated it was not out of order in committee to reference the history of a bill or members of the other body. She remarked that most of the provisions in the bill had been in other elections bills over the past four years. She thought it would make more sense to discuss pieces and parts that someone may not like and other parts that someone may claim authorship over.

Co-Chair Foster remarked that he had mentioned earlier he would leave public testimony open. He commented that it had already become a messy process. He noted that the bill had come to the committee very late in the game and he was not happy with the way the process was unfolding. He would ask the legislators to come up and speak to clear up the record

as they had been referred to numerous times. He would then have staff complete the bill presentation prior to any questions from committee members.

Co-Chair Schrage asked if they were maintaining consistency on a two-minute limit.

Co-Chair Foster replied that the limit had been two minutes but he had let a previous testifier speak for five minutes. He asked to keep the time reasonable.

Representative Bynum stated he would love to get through the slide deck but there was a suggestion the committee would hear a review of the sectional analysis. He would save most of his questions until the sectional if that was the case because it was specifically about each element of the bill. He asked if that was something Co-Chair Foster planned to do.

Co-Chair Foster replied that the committee would hear public testimony followed by the rest of the PowerPoint presentation. He agreed the committee could hear a review of the sectional that evening if members wanted.

Representative Bynum stated it was not necessary to hear the sectional that evening, but he wanted to hear it at some point.

Co-Chair Foster agreed. He invited remarks from Representative Vance.

REPRESENTATIVE SARAH VANCE, appreciated the latitude and remarked that it seemed highly unusual to have members not on the committee provide testimony; however, she stated it was a bit unusual to have a bill presentation mention other members so frequently. She would limit her remarks to the process and would not speak to positions on different areas of the bill out of deference to the committee. She shared that she and Senator Shower had been working in a bipartisan nature on elections bills throughout her time in the legislature and on many compromises. She relayed that there was a lot of reference to prior year's work, which was accurate; however, the work in the current bill had been dramatically changed and it felt disingenuous to reference "our work as if we still support the current form." She stated her preference for the committee to focus on the policy being presented and the merit of that policy

instead of trying to invoke their names and work in order to influence support. She stated it was what the appearance had been, and she believed it was the reason members had asked to hear from her and Senator Shower. She confirmed they had put a lot of work into the topic; however, an agreement had not been reached. She noted that her office had been working on a larger amendment that could hopefully close up some loopholes. She thought it was disingenuous when "our" work made up more than half of the bill presentation and did not focus on areas of work introduced by people carrying the bill. She was not in support of the bill as it stood. She believed many other changes needed to be made. She did not support the use of her name in order to sway members. She stated the work had been dramatically changed.

[7:15:42 PM](#)

SENATOR MIKE SHOWER, shared that he had been approached at the beginning of session with the chance to have a bipartisan effort in the election bill. He appreciated it, including the two staff members currently sitting behind him. He relayed that throughout the process, the bill had been heavily weighted towards making it easy to vote and hard to cheat. He stated that the bill was currently very weighted on the easy to vote side. He had always tried to represent both, but he had been heavy on the security or election integrity side. He clarified there had been many bills in the past and he described the current bill as cherry picking certain parts of the bills. He stated there were other bills that were much more precise on election integrity/security. He believed his name was being used throughout the bill presentation to legitimize the bill as the conservative Mat-Su republican. He stated that was inaccurate. He highlighted that his name had been used in association with the bill during a hearing in Senate State Affairs and he had "run down" to testify to clarify that he did not want his name on the bill because he did not know whether he agreed with it.

Senator Shower relayed that he had withdrawn support for the bill because the boundaries he wanted included to make it acceptable did not make it into the bill. He stated that it failed to meet the balance of easy to vote/hard to cheat. He read items that had been in the bill at the start that he characterized as being on the left side of the issue or the voting access side: remove witness signature

(included in the bill), curing (included in the bill), ballot drop boxes with no limits (included in the bill), special needs ballot changes (included in the bill, but no limit on the amount that could be harvested was included as he had requested), rural liaisons (included in the bill), prepaid postage (included in the bill), language access (included in the bill), permanent absentee voting (was included in the bill, which he did not want at all), rules for determining residence of voter (included in the bill), true source (included in the bill and he did not know where it had come from).

Senator Shower stated that two things that were not included in the bill initially were same day registration - which was a hard line for him and was stripped out - and electronic signatures. He shared that on "our side" the initial bill included ballot tracking as an offset to curing and contingency language to ensure both would be enacted. He pointed out that the contingency language was not included. He shared that there had been a robust package pertaining to MFA [multi-factor authentication] data security and the bill currently only included one sentence on the issue. The bill did not include a repeal or opt-in of automatic voter registration, which was "our" biggest ask for cleaning up voter rolls. The bill did not include a provision to prevent counting of ballots after election day. Additionally, if the witness signature requirement was eliminated, he had suggested requiring a person to list two attestors the state could use if there was a problem. He stated it had been too burdensome and the bill was a watered down version, which essentially did nothing on the security side.

Senator Shower recognized there were some good things in the bill. The bill included voter roll cleanup and tribal ID, both things had been agreed to by both parties. The bill also included some AI language to put boundaries on the emerging section of election law, which he believed was important. The bill also included data sharing language, which was also important. He stressed that the items were all generic nonpartisan things that did not fall under the easy to vote or harder to cheat categories. From his perspective a balanced bill would include tabulation machines with no transmission ability and making them open source software and hardware that were made in the U.S., no ballots accepted after election day (included in a federal executive order), move all dates to the right to allow the

state to count on election night, repeal ranked choice voting, requiring photo identification to vote, no ballot harvesting, ballot chain of custody protocols, data security protocols, and MFA with digital security identifiers. He stated "we've" suggested all of the things in the past. He clarified that none of the items were included in the bill he had been given at the start. He relayed that the bill was heavily weighted in one direction. He clarified that he had withdrawn his support for the bill. He stated that all of the items his party asked for were ignored and were not included in the bill. He stressed that the bill was too imbalanced for him. He did not want his name thrown around as if he supported the bill because there was much more to the story that was not being reported on. He thanked the committee for the opportunity to speak.

[7:22:00 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster appreciated the clarifications for the record.

Representative Allard stated she had never seen a legislator referenced by name so many times in a committee bill hearing. She had been alarmed [by the reference to legislators' names]. She appreciated that Co-Chair Foster allowed her colleagues to clarify their position on the record. She asked not to have legislators' names used.

Co-Chair Foster asked the bill sponsor's staff and legal counsel to continue with their review. He asked members to write down their questions for after the presentation.

Representative Bynum asked for verification that at some point the committee would hear a review of the sectional.

Co-Chair Foster replied that he wanted to hear the remainder of the presentation followed by the sectional and then questions. He asked Mr. Dunsmore to resume the presentation.

Mr. Dunsmore addressed the bill's creation of a ballot curing process on slide 19. The curing process would enable voters to cure mistakes that would otherwise result in the rejection of their ballot. He read from the slide:

- Within 24 hours of receiving the ballot, the Division mails a deficiency notice with curing instructions.
- If the voter has a phone number on file, the Division will call and text them as well.
- The voter returns the cure form confirming they voted the ballot with a copy of their ID and a signature.
- The cure process may be done electronically.
- A properly cured ballot will be counted if it is otherwise valid.
- If the voter responds that they did not vote the ballot, it will be referred to the Attorney General.

[7:25:28 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore turned to slide 20 and explained that a voter would be able to cure their ballot and have it counted if it were rejected because the voter did not sign the ballot envelope or the voter did not provide an identifier that could be verified. He noted that the slide incorrectly listed one of the reasons for ballot rejection as the voter's signature could not be verified. He explained that signature verification was not in the bill. He turned to slide 21 and relayed that at least 24 states and numerous jurisdictions at the municipal level had adopted ballot curing processes. He moved to slide 22 and relayed that the bill contained a provision to stop special needs ballots from being rejected due to mistakes by poll workers or voter representatives. He reviewed the slide:

- Currently special needs ballots can be rejected because of mistakes by poll workers or voter representatives.
- In the 2024 general election 5.7% of special needs ballots were rejected, compared with only 1.8% of by-mail ballots.
- Special needs rejections are especially high in rural Alaska, with 37.5% of special needs ballots in District 40 being rejected.
- Often one volunteer will deliver special needs ballots to all residents of a senior living facility, so if this person is not properly trained an entire facility could have their votes rejected.

- SB 64 codifies requirements for DOE to check IDs and collect information from representatives.

Mr. Dunsmore asked Ms. Kawasaki to discuss some strengthening of election integrity procedures for special needs ballots that were added in the Senate.

Ms. Kawasaki relayed that an amendment adopted on the Senate floor added what the bill sponsor believed were reasonable security measures to the special needs ballot procedures that were in existing law and codified some of the duties that elections officials were already performing in order to improve compliance. Under current law if a person due to disability (including sickness or being elderly) could not go in person to vote, they could send a representative to a polling place to obtain a ballot for them. Under law, the representative must return the ballot after the person voted. The added amendment tried to balance limiting the possibility of voter fraud while ensuring legitimate votes were counted. The components in the bill would require a valid photo ID or tribal ID to be shown to the elections official, in addition to documentation of the representative's information before release of the ballot to the representative.

Ms. Kawasaki continued to review bill provisions related to special needs ballots. The bill included the requirement that the election official instruct representatives on their duties and a stipulation that suspicious ballots indicating interference or misconduct by the representative or poll worker would be subject to further review. Additionally, the bill required the Division of Elections to train all officials who had the authority to issue special needs ballots. The changes were meant to induce compliance by elections officials, representatives, and voters while providing assurances for the security conscious members of the legislature. She noted that the sponsor had heard a lot of concern about special needs ballots. The hope was that the added measures would deter bad actors, create greater accountability, and provide for improved documentation, which could evidence and investigate potential misconduct.

[7:29:48 PM](#)

Representative Allard asked Co-Chair Foster if questions would be held until the end.

Co-Chair Foster responded affirmatively.

Mr. Dunsmore moved to slide 23 and relayed that the bill required secure drop boxes to be provided for by-mail ballots. Currently, whether to have drop boxes and the number of drop boxes was up to the Division of Elections. The bill required guardrails around the discretion for drop boxes. He explained that in the last three general election cycles there were varying amounts of drop boxes and the last cycle there were no drop boxes, causing voters confusion. Under the bill, drop boxes would be required if practicable at Division of Elections offices, but any other drop boxes must only be done if the division established regulations calling for locations and security procedures. The bill limited the division's ability to have drop boxes outside of its offices. He turned to slide 24 and highlighted that the bill included a requirement for return paid postage for absentee by-mail envelopes.

Mr. Dunsmore turned to slide 25 and discussed that the bill adopted a ballot tracking system for absentee ballots:

- The Division already offers ballot tracking to allow voters to check whether their ballot has been counted, this bill requires tracking barcodes to allow ballots to be tracked in the mail.
- Voters can check the status of their ballot online and see whether it has been counted or rejected.
- This bill requires a multi-factor authentication system to protect voters' privacy

Mr. Dunsmore elaborated that the Senate Finance Committee added language requiring any multi-factor authentication service procured from an outside vendor to be an American vendor. He advanced to slide 25 and highlighted there were several provisions in the bill providing for faster and more transparent election results:

- Begin ballot review 12 days before the election (instead of the current 7 days) to allow more ballots to be counted on Election Night
- Providing ranked choice voting tabulations when unofficial results are released

- Setting a uniform deadline of 10 days after the election for absentee ballots to arrive, allowing elections to be certified 5 days earlier

[7:33:30 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore moved to slide 27 and addressed the bill's provision to clarify how the true source disclosure requirements apply to groups that endorse ballot measures or ballot questions. He explained there was recently an Alaska Public Offices Commission (APOC) advisory opinion that caused confusion about whether community groups or other organizations where ballot measures or campaigns were not their primary purpose would have to disclose their entire finances if they were ever to mention their support or opposition for a ballot proposition on their website or newsletter. The bill contained a provision clarifying that the entity making a communication was the true source of their own contribution with regard to ballot measures and ballot questions.

Mr. Dunsmore advanced to slide 28 and relayed that the bill adopted national best practices for reporting ranked-choice voting results by having the ranked-choice tabulations reported along with the unofficial results. The bill required transparency of data about which results had been counted to allow members of the public and media to determine which ballots had been counted and which ballots had not been counted (slide 29).

[7:34:42 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore turned to slide 30 and discussed provisions clarifying the rules for poll watchers and ballot review observers:

- Currently statutes only provide for observers for political parties, candidates, initiatives, referenda, and recalls at polls and counting centers, and only parties may observe the State Review Board.
- This provision clarifies that candidates, ballot measure, and ballot question campaigns may have observers at polls, counting centers, and the State Review Board.
- Ballot questions include constitutional amendments, judicial retention, bond propositions, and advisory votes.

- This bill also clarifies that campaigns may have observers at all tables where ballots are being reviewed within a counting center.

[7:35:38 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore turned to slide 31 and detailed that the bill required clear rules for challenging ballot review decisions, which was currently not provided for in statute. He noted that the manual adopted by the Division of Elections for the previous election provided more guidance. The bill required regulations to explicitly address the challenge process and required regulations to allow a reasonable time for a campaign to submit a challenge. He moved to slide 32 and relayed that the bill required the Division of Elections to add additional risk limiting audit procedures to the State Review Board process. The audits would be designed using statistical methods to ensure counting machines were working correctly. Campaigns would be able to fully observe the State Review Board process including the additional risk-limiting audit. The bill included a provision requiring the division to adopt regulations for a cyber security program to protect from data breaches and hackers and require training on cyber security for elections officials (slide 33). The Senate Finance Committee added a provision to require disclosures of breaches of election hardware or confidential election information to be disclosed to the public and the legislature.

[7:37:17 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore moved to slide 34 and explained that the bill included provisions that were similar to a bill that had previously passed the House in the last legislature. The bill would ban the use of undisclosed deep fakes to influence Alaska elections and provided that someone defamed by an election-related deep fake may seek injunctive relief and provided for a standard identifier for how to disclose a deep fake.

Mr. Dunsmore turned to slide 35 and relayed that the bill would repeal a statutory requirement that APOC have offices in every Senate district. The legislature had never provided sufficient appropriation to meet the statutory requirement. The bill removed the statutory requirement that APOC was not able to comply with.

Representative Allard asked for a repeat of the information on slide 35.

Mr. Dunsmore repeated the information pertaining to slide 35. He moved to slide 36 and explained that the bill codified the ACLU of Alaska v. State of Alaska settlement with regard to campaign signs. He noted there had been some mention of the issue during public testimony. He detailed that currently in Alaska statutes, most large campaign signs were technically illegal if they were along state roadways. In 2018, there was a settlement where the state agreed it was unconstitutional to enforce the provision and agreed to not enforce it on signs up to 32 square feet (4x8 feet), which was the standard size for a large political sign in Alaska. The provision aligned the statute with the stipulated judgement the state was already required by the court to enforce. He clarified that large campaign signs would no longer be illegal in statute.

Mr. Dunsmore advanced to slide 37 and relayed that the bill required public official financial disclosures for Redistricting Board members. Redistricting Board members were not currently required to file the disclosures. The bill would add the members to the list of dozens of boards where financial disclosure was required. Slide 38 addressed that the bill clarified that the Open Meetings Act applied to the Redistricting Board. He noted it was similar to the sign provision, making it clear in statute how the courts had interpreted current law. The Alaska Supreme Court had ruled at least twice that the Open Meetings Act applied. He explained that likely, because the Redistricting Board was recreated every ten years, it did not have institutional memory. He explained that clarifying it in statute would make it clear that the Redistricting Board was subject to the Open Meetings Act.

Mr. Dunsmore turned to slide 39 and addressed a bill provision allowing voters to request to continue to receive absentee by-mail ballots for future elections. The division currently allowed a process for military and overseas voters to do so. He elaborated that voters would stop receiving the ballots if they did not vote at least once every four years or if their mail was returned to sender. The ballots would be subject to the ballot review process like any other absentee ballot to ensure validity.

7:41:52 PM

Mr. Dunsmore moved to slide 40, highlighting a bill provision codifying the requirement in federal law to provide language assistance in certain precincts and to post notices at precincts where language assistance was available. There was a settlement in the Toyukak case that provided clear guidelines that the state was required to provide language assistance. He concluded the presentation.

Co-Chair Foster requested a review of the sectional analysis.

Mr. Dunsmore reviewed the sectional analysis (copy on file):

Section 1: clarifies the residency requirements to define a residence as a place where a voter has a reasonable and articulable plan to return to whenever they are absent and provides that the presumption that a voter's registered address is correct may be rebutted by evidence that the voter has established residency at a different location.

Section 2: adds tribal identification cards to the list of acceptable identification for voter registration in person and removes hunting or fishing licenses from the list.

Section 3: adds tribal identification cards to the list of acceptable identification for voter registration by mail and removes hunting or fishing licenses list.

Section 4: established that the Division of Elections (Division) may only use Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) applicant information shared by the Department of Revenue for voter registration and voter roll maintenance and requires the Division to submit annual reports to the Legislature detailing how this data has been used for list maintenance.

Section 5: requires the Division of Elections (Division) to send a single forwardable notice as part of voter list maintenance and adds additional categories of voters to receive notices.

Section 6: is conforming language to reflect the changes made in Section 5.

Section 7: is conforming language to reflect the changes made in Section 5.

Section 8: establishes that registering to vote through a Permanent Fund Dividend application is not considered contacting the Division for purposes of the voter roll clean-up statutes.

Section 9: requires the Division to conduct a regular review of the voter register and to hire an expert to conduct the review and submit a report to the Legislature.

Section 10: requires the director to develop a process for voters to cancel their registrations and require that instructions for how to cancel one's registration be prominently posted at polling places.

Section 11: requires the Division to notify the public and the Legislature of breaches of confidential elections data.

Section 12: creates a rural community liaison position in the Division.

Section 13: allows political parties, candidates, ballot measure, and ballot question campaigns to have observers at polling places and counting centers and clarifies that campaigns may have observers at all locations within a counting center where ballots are being reviewed or counted.

[7:46:06 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore continued reviewing the sectional analysis:

Section 14: repeals the requirement for the Alaska Public Offices Commission (APOC) to have offices in every senate district.

Section 15: establishes that the true source of a contribution supporting or opposing a ballot measure or question is the entity making the contribution.

Section 16: repeals required specifications for voting booths.

Section 17: is a conforming section reflecting the repealed language in Section 16.

Section 18: requires that notices be posted informing voters of language assistance available at precincts where it is required by federal law.

Section 19: adds tribal identification cards to the list of identifications voters may use at polling places, removes hunting and fishing licenses from the list, and clarifies that when a voter uses a utility bill, bank statement, check, or other government document as identification that the document must be dated within the previous 60 days.

Section 20: clarifying that, except for hand count precincts, the Division must include results for all rank levels on the precinct results.

Section 21: enacts new subsections related to unofficial results and ballot review data.

Subsection (b) requires the Division to release data for which ballots have been counted along with unofficial results.

Subsection (c) requires the Division to release data for count codes for absentee ballots each day ballots are reviewed.

Subsection (d) provides a definition of "count code."

Section 22: repeals the requirement that poll worker compensation be set by regulation.

Section 23: allows candidates and ballot proposition campaigns to observe the State Review Board process and repeals language suggesting that observers can assist with the review process.

[7:48:07 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore continued reviewing the sectional analysis:

Section 24: requires the Division to adopt additional risk limiting audit procedures as part of the State Review Board process.

Section 25: requires that all absentee ballots include a postage-paid return envelope. It also requires that there is a space for recording the date that the voter executed the certificate.

Section 26: codifies security measures for special needs ballots.

Section 27: is a conforming change reflecting the changes made in Section 26.

Section 28: provides that special needs ballots may not be rejected because of errors made by poll workers or representatives.

Section 29: repeals the witness signature requirement for absentee ballots.

Section 30: states that a ballot received after the day of the election that is not postmarked or postmarked after the election may be counted if it is marked with a United States Postal Service tracking barcode that indicates it was mailed on or before the day of the election.

Section 31: adds tribal identification cards to the list of acceptable identification for a first-time voter who registered by mail or electronically who votes absentee and removes hunting or fishing licenses from the list.

Section 32: requires all absentee by-mail ballots to be received within 10 days of the election.

Section 33: allows voters to register to continue to receive absentee by mail ballots so long as the voter votes at least once every four years.

Section 34: allows absentee voting officials to transmit cover sheets for absentee ballot packages electronically.

Section 35: requires absentee ballot review to begin 12 days before the election.

Section 36: contains conforming amendments to reflect the repeal of the witness signature requirement the new tracking barcode provisions, and the changes to the list of acceptable identifications.

[7:50:18 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore continued reviewing the sectional analysis:

Section 37: requires the Division to adopt procedures for challenging ballot review decisions by regulation and that these regulations must provide a reasonable amount of time to submit a challenge.

Section 38: provides that ballots that are properly cured under the new statute shall be counted during the state review board process if they were not previously counted.

Section 39: enacts two new sections of statutes:  
New AS 15.20.221 requires the division to establish a ballot tracking system to allow a voter to track the status of their absentee by-mail ballot.  
New AS 15.20.222 provides for ballot curing for absentee ballots.

Subsection (a) requires the division to notify voters if there is no signature on the envelope or if the voter did not provide a sufficient identifier of the process to cure their ballot.

Subsection (b) requires that these notices must explain the need for a signature for verification purposes and include a form for the voter to provide their signature and copy of the identification.

Subsection (c) provides that a ballot may be cured and counted if the voter returns the form, confirms that they did in fact vote, and provides a signature and copy of their identification.

Subsection (d) provides that a ballot shall not be counted, and the director will refer the matter to the attorney general for investigation,

if the voter indicates they did not in fact vote the ballot.

7:51:57 PM

Mr. Dunsmore continued reviewing the sectional analysis:

Section 40: repeals the requirement that ballots that arrived after the deadline for ballots to arrive be counted during a recount.

Section 41: requires that the director provide secure ballot drop boxes at every Division office, adopt regulations for security standards for drop boxes, and allows municipalities to provide drop boxes in accordance with regulations adopted by the Division.

Section 42: clarifies that the return postage for absentee by-mail ballots required by Section 26 does not violate the prohibition on giving a thing of value in exchange for a person voting.

Section 43: clarifies that intentionally opening or tampering with ballot envelopes without the permission of the Division and hacking or altering election machinery is covered by the crime of unlawful interference with an election.

Section 44: provides that an election official who knowingly discloses election results before the polls close commits the crime of election official misconduct in the first degree.

Section 45: requires the lieutenant governor to develop a cybersecurity program to defend the voter registration records kept by the division.

Section 46: prohibits undisclosed use of synthetic media in electioneering communications and allows persons defamed by election related synthetic media to sue for injunctive relief.

Section 47: codifies the settlement in ACLU of Alaska v. State of Alaska related to campaign signs along state highways.

Section 48: removes the requirement that reports filed with APOC be available at offices in every senate district and requires that they be available on APOC's website.

Section 49: clarifies that reports filed with APOC shall be available at the commission's offices and on their website.

[7:54:09 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore continued reviewing the sectional analysis:

Section 50: requires Redistricting Board members to file annual public official financial disclosures with APOC.

Section 51: requires PFD applications to include a prominent notice informing applicants of their right to opt out of registering to vote or updating their voter registration.

Section 52: requires online PFD applications to inform applicants of their right to opt out of registering to vote or updating their voter registration.

Section 53: requires the Department of Revenue to share certain information concerning PFD applications to the Division for the purpose of voter registration and voter roll maintenance.

Section 54: requires the Department of Revenue to develop security measures to protect that data being shared under Section 51.

Section 55: clarifies that the Redistricting Board is subject to the Open Meetings Act.

Section 56: repeals redundant language relating to poll watchers and PFD applicant data sharing.

Section 57: requires the division to provide a report to the legislature by November 1, 2026, with recommendations for expanding early voting in rural communities and low-income neighborhoods.

Section 58: states that Sections 41-43 only applies to offenses committed after the effective date of this act.

Section 59: provides a July 1, 2026 effective date for this bill.

[7:55:43 PM](#)

Representative Allard asked for a repeat of section 57.

Mr. Dunsmore complied.

Co-Chair Foster thanked Mr. Dunsmore for reviewing the sectional.

Representative Allard requested to hear a review of the fiscal note.

Co-Chair Foster asked his staff to review the fiscal notes.

BRODIE ANDERSON, STAFF, REPRESENTATIVE NEAL FOSTER, highlighted the zero fiscal note from the Department of Administration, APOC, OMB component 70. The second fiscal note was an indeterminate note from the Department of Revenue (DOR), OMB component 981. The fund source was also indeterminate. He noted the department recognized the passage of the bill would require some regulation changes.

Representative Stapp remarked that it would be nice to have DOR explain the reason for its indeterminate note.

Mr. Anderson replied that throughout the day the director of the Permanent Fund Dividend Division was available online; however, due to the late hour they were no longer available. He believed the individual would be available at the next hearing on the bill during normal business hours.

Co-Chair Foster requested to ensure the director was available for the 1:30 p.m. meeting the following day.

Mr. Anderson reviewed the fiscal note from the Office of the Governor, Elections, OMB component 21. The note included components beginning in FY 27 including \$181,200 in personal services, \$5,000 for travel, \$208,500 for services, \$3,000 for commodities, for a total of \$397,700 in unrestricted general funds (UGF) for FY 27. The cost

dropped to \$319,700 in outyears due to a drop in personal services and services. The note reflected a capital cost of \$788,000. The Division of Elections would require regulation changes. The cost for personal services was for the hiring of a rural community liaison along with associated costs for travel, contractual services, and commodities. He elaborated that \$80,000 of the FY 27 cost was for temporary staff for the curing process. Additionally, there were increased costs for postage in FY 27. He noted that pages 2 and 3 of the fiscal note provided additional detail on associated costs. He explained that the Senate Finance Committee zeroed out the capital cost of \$788,000, but the Division of Elections had reinserted the cost. He expounded that from conversations with the Legislative Finance Division (LFD), the lapsing funds occurring in the Office of the Governor would cover the capital costs until FY 27 when they could be added to the FY 27 budget.

[8:02:39 PM](#)

Representative Allard asked how long the current meeting would be. She shared that her questions would take a substantial amount of time.

Co-Chair Foster replied that he had no set time. He requested to hear questions on the fiscal notes prior to general questions about the bill.

Representative Allard would wait until other members asked their questions before asking her own.

Representative Bynum looked at the fiscal note from the Office of the Governor, page 2 showing a requirement for prepaid postage. He highlighted that the fiscal note showed the postage cost of 78 cents per envelope. He thought previous mail-in ballots required two stamps. He asked if there was an error in the calculation for what it would require to mail the envelope. Alternatively, he wondered if the state was getting a special deal because for prepaid envelopes.

Mr. Anderson deferred the question to the Division of Elections.

CAROL BEECHER, DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF ELECTIONS (via teleconference), replied that the postage costs were

estimated each time an election was held, partly due to the size of the ballot. She explained that for the past election, particularly the general election where there were many presidential candidates, a ballot initiative, and numerous judges, the ballot was 17 inches, which was larger in size and resulted in a two-stamp envelope. She explained that sometimes the envelope only required one stamp; therefore, the fiscal note was based on the size estimate for the ballot.

Representative Bynum stated his understanding that for each election the division would make a determination based on the size of the ballot. He provided a hypothetical example where there were 642 people filing for governor in the next election and the ballot was 32 pages. He asked if the postage would reflect the ballot size.

Ms. Beecher confirmed that if the ballot required a larger envelope, it would require more postage as it got heavier.

8:06:30 PM

Representative Stapp referenced information on the fiscal note related to the governor's office lapsing funds. He asked Mr. Anderson to elaborate.

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Mr. Anderson stated that Section 20, subsection (d) of SB 57 (the capital budget that passed the House) reappropriated lapsing funds of the Governor's Office FY 25 balances from the operating budget to a capital budget project that included election equipment as an eligible use. The appropriation could be used for the SB 64 fiscal note until the FY 27 budget was in front of the legislature the following year.

Representative Stapp stated that he saw the maneuver in the capital budget and was curious how it would work when the budget was at a deficit with the failure of an affirmative vote to use funds from the Constitutional Budget Reserve (CBR).

Mr. Anderson replied that the CBR vote was a policy discussion left up to the representatives. He deferred to legislators to make that decision.

Representative Stapp wondered how it was possible to reappropriate money from a deficit budget that was not funded. He imagined that any lapsing funds would go to fill the deficit.

Co-Chair Foster replied that all of the individuals who would normally be online were not available due to the time. He asked members to make note of questions that were not answered during the current meeting.

[8:10:55 PM](#)

Co-Chair Foster planned to continue the meeting for a bit longer. He discussed his plans for the schedule the following day.

Representative Allard would hold her questions until the following day. She stated she had a lot of questions.

Representative Hannan looked at Section 57 of the bill that asked the department to do some analysis on how to better serve rural and low income neighborhoods. She loved the idea, but she observed that it would not be implemented for the general election in 2026. She thought it was a strange time to have the department do a massive report in the middle of an election cycle. She wondered why a date like January 1 had not been selected. She thought requiring the department to provide a report one week before the election, when it was not used in the election, would split the department's attention.

Mr. Dunsmore answered that the provision was included in the bill because when the Senate Rules Committee was tasked with preparing the bill, it was tasked with reviewing legislation introduced in previous legislatures. The bill adjusted the dates from a bill that was previously introduced. The topic had not been discussed much in committee, but he believed Representative Hannan's point on the timeline was reasonable. He explained that at the Division of Election's request the effective date of the bill was July 1, 2026, which would not provide enough time for a thorough, thoughtful review and implement the

recommendations in time for an August primary and November election.

Representative Hannan stated her understanding there was no reason the date currently in the bill was set in stone and was it was merely a carryover date [from prior legislation]. She believed having the division analyze data from the November 2026 election may be helpful in formulating recommendations to improve the 2028 cycle. She suggested making the deadline after the 2026 election and early enough that the division could act on it.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that he believed Representative Hannan was correct. He would inquire with the office of the legislator who had sponsored the previous legislation to see if there was any more insight into the date.

Representative Hannan reasoned that the bill was now in the House Finance Committee's possession and as had been said in committee, the origin of the elements was somewhat irrelevant. She remarked that unless there was a substantive reason, she would likely offer an amendment [to change the date]. She wanted the Division of Elections focused on the election until the election was over.

Representative Jimmie highlighted that Florida spent significant resources investigating non-citizen voting and found only one conviction out of 12 million registered voters. Given similarly negligible findings in Alaska, there was a single incident connected to nine individuals in the 2024 election. She asked why they were continuing to focus on fraud rather than voter access.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that SB 64 had been prepared by the Senate Rules Committee at the request of Senate leadership and it was designed to be a comprehensive bipartisan package that addressed concerns from legislators across the spectrum. He would not speak to why legislators had proposed certain provisions, but he believed it was fair to say that the Senate's passage of the bill on a bipartisan basis reflected a decision that it was important to preserve the integrity of Alaska's elections, not only by ensuring voter rolls were accurate, but also ensuring every Alaskan eligible to vote had their vote counted.

[8:18:29 PM](#)

Representative Jimmie compared voter fraud to a single snowflake and disenfranchisement to an avalanche impacting hundreds of rural Alaskans. She asked how the legislature was justifying spending all of its time trying to catch a snowflake.

Mr. Dunsmore responded that it was a question that legislators should consider in crafting the legislation.

Representative Jimmie asked for an explanation of historical claims of voter fraud that had been used to justify racially suppressive voting measures.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that he was not an expert on the area but he knew that in the past Alaska had a history of policies that ran afoul of the Voting Rights Act and subjected the state to further scrutiny to ensure its election procedures were not discriminating against the voting rights of Alaskans. He believed there were some changes in U.S. Supreme Court precedent that removed the Department of Justice's ability to enforce some of those provisions. He noted there had been a determination in the past that in Alaska there had been occurrences of disparate treatment of voters on a racial basis.

Representative Bynum noted that he did not hear Representative Jimmie's previous question.

Representative Jimmie restated her question.

[8:20:49 PM](#)

Representative Jimmie asked how opposing the availability of drop boxes in rural areas prevented cheating without making it harder to vote if drop boxes were secured, monitored, and tracked. She highlighted that after reconstruction, southern states claimed voter fraud was rampant to justify poll taxes and literacy tests effectively disenfranchising black voters, while exempting white voters through a grandfather clause. She elaborated that in 1950 and 1960 states purged voter rolls citing fraud prevention, but disproportionately targeted black and indigenous voters, reducing their political power. She relayed that in more recent decades, strict voter ID laws were enacted under the guise of preventing fraud. She stated that courts had struck down some of the laws noting

they disproportionately affect minority and low income voters without substantial evidence of fraud.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that the provisions in the bill would require drop boxes at all Division of Elections offices, including rural Alaska. He recognized that the Division of Elections did not have offices in every community.

Representative Jimmie asked how much taxpayer money had been suggested through the [bill] process that the state should spend to prevent fraud when proven cases were so rare that they barely registered statistically.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that it would not be possible to get a number for provisions that had been discussed that did not have fiscal notes prepared. He believed some of the things he heard earlier in the day during public testimony would have a substantial fiscal note.

[8:23:27 PM](#)

Representative Jimmie asked what specific considerations had been made to account for rural Alaskans who may lack easy access to witness a signature, especially when the alternative was losing their vote.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that the bill repealed the requirement for a witness signature but maintained existing requirements the Division of Elections used for question ballots to verify the voter's identity to ensure that no Alaskan was denied their right to vote for a purely technical thing that served no election integrity purpose.

Representative Jimmie stated she kept hearing about [the bill] balancing to make it easier to vote and harder to cheat. She asked how the balance was not merely a false equivalency given the negligence fraud rate.

Mr. Dunsmore answered that part of making it harder to cheat meant that the state should not be cheating Alaskans of their constitutional right to vote for a procedure that there had been ample evidence submitted in hearing after hearing served no purpose whatsoever. The best argument he heard for the witness signature was that it made people feel comfortable there was a fig leaf to tell people who were concerned about the issue even though he believed the hours of testimony heard on the bill in various committees

demonstrated the witness signature did nothing to protect election integrity and hurt it by taking valid Alaskans' votes out of the totals.

Representative Jimmie asked what the cost to democracy was when they prioritized preventing a nearly non-existent problem over counting every valid vote.

Me. Dunsmore believed Representative Allard had accurately showed that the cost to democracy in the last election was that over 500 Alaskans did not have their votes counted. He thanked Representative Allard for putting it on the record.

Representative Galvin was thinking about the 512 Alaskans who unfortunately did not have their voice heard in the election. Additionally, she recalled that an entire bag of ballots was found on the side of the road after an election. She believed the ballots were from rural Alaska. She wondered if there was anything in the bill with regard to tightening the chain of custody of ballots. She was very concerned that somehow ballots coming from rural Alaska did not seem to be getting the attention they deserved.

[8:27:49 PM](#)

Mr. Dunsmore replied that he was familiar with the incident referenced by Representative Galvin, but he did not recall the specifics enough to speak to it in depth. He believed the ballots had been carried by a contractor for the postal service. In many parts of rural Alaska, the mail was not provided by U.S. Postal Service planes. He relayed that the Division of Elections had a robust chain of custody procedure for ballots. He detailed that polling places were required to document every ballot they had and if a voter spoiled a ballot and it was destroyed, the polling place was required to document it. The polling places were required to submit substantial data back to allow for the Division of Elections and the auditing review process before certification to make sure all ballots were accounted for. Additionally, the Division of Elections experimented with using electronic tracking on ballot packages in the general election. He was told it was not particularly successful in being able to track packages in transit through rural Alaska.

Representative Galvin asked about slide 40 related to codifying language assistance requirements. She referenced

Tagalog and eight indigenous languages and Anchorage and 105 languages. She stated there was a lot going on with regard to needs for language access. She asked for comment on how to better accommodate Alaskans.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that federal law required the state to prepare election materials and languages based on the percentage of people who speak a language (other than English) in a district. He believed it was currently eight indigenous languages and dialects as well as Tagalog or languages meeting requirements for certain parts of the state. He detailed that in the Toyukak case the state agreed to expand the language assistance to provide various dialogues of indigenous languages like Yupik rather than using just one standard to make sure people were getting language assistance in the dialect their community used. He noted that the Division of Elections could speak more about the requirements. He added that voters who spoke a language that did not have language assistance offered had the right to have someone assist them in voting (e.g., a poll worker or family member).

[8:32:16 PM](#)

Representative Galvin remarked that the committee had heard about individuals who were 16 years old and older helping in rural Alaska with language and other things. She thought she heard individuals had to be at least 18 years old. She wondered if the bill needed an amendment to fix the age. She thought there could potentially be a challenge by rural districts. She thought the individuals were referred to as youth ambassadors. She wondered if a statutory change was needed.

Mr. Dunsmore believed Representative Galvin was referring to a point raised by Representative Jimmie the previous day about the youth ambassador program designed for people under the age of 18 to work in assisting language and how it conflicted with the witness signature requirement that the witness be over the age of 18. He explained it meant there were people tasked with assisting with the voting process who were not able to provide a witness signature. He did not know if youth ambassadors were engaged in providing language assistance. He noted it would be a question for the Division of Elections.

Representative Galvin explained that she was just looking to make sure there was not a need for an amendment to allow for the possibility of youth ambassadors providing assistance. She noted that hopefully the witness signature would not come to be. She could take the issue offline.

Representative Allard appreciated what Representative Jimmie brought up, but she stated that as an individual who was also a minority, she did not want to be treated any differently. She stated she resented the fact that it was implied that because a person was a minority or of a different race that they should be treated differently. She stated that for her it implied that she did not understand the rules or the laws or that she could not get an ID because she was somewhat stupid or did not have the ability to do it. She suggested that if the comment was about rural Alaska, there may need to be certain rules in place because it was a rural community and due to the language barrier.

8:35:35 PM

Representative Bynum asked what measures were in the bill that directly addressed voter fraud or potential fraud.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that there were several provisions. He clarified there was not actually a crime in Alaska law called voter fraud. He noted it was a blanket term that people used for election-related crimes. There were two updates to election related crimes in the bill to explicitly add certain election official misconduct as well as tampering with ballot envelopes or hacking voting machines. There were significant new sections included with regard to special needs voting to address the concern that it may be possible to commit fraud associated with special needs voting, although there had never been any evidence of special needs voting being used to commit fraud. He knew many people considered ballot tracking to be an important fraud detection measure because it enabled a person to see their ballot going through the postal system without any interference. He added that if a person did not request an absentee ballot, it would allow a person to check to see if an absentee ballot had been requested in their name. The ballot curing provision was an important anti-fraud measure. He detailed that if a person attempted to impersonate a voter and fraudulently requested an absentee ballot in their name, presumably they would provide an identifier that did not match. He elaborated that the

legitimate voter would receive a cure notice and would have an opportunity to report the issue, which would be required to go to the Department of Law for investigation. He believed there were likely other provisions in the bill providing protections that he did not currently recall.

Representative Bynum asked if there were current measures in the Division of Elections that were being sought out to look for issues with ballots and potential fraud events.

Mr. Dunsmore stated that the division could speak better to its current internal processes. He relayed that as a matter of practice in Alaska it was generally the Department of Law, likely in consultation with the Department of Public Safety, that oversaw criminal investigations. The Division of Elections had steep security measures in place.

[8:40:07 PM](#)

Representative Bynum asked if the Division of Elections employed anyone who specifically looked for fraud.

Mr. Dunsmore answered that he was not aware of the Division of Elections having a dedicated position for the purpose.

Representative Bynum asked if there were any studies, data driven investigations, or reports performed by the Division of Elections, the department of justice, or the Department of Law that specifically focus on investigating fraud and potential misuse of the state's election system.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that he was not aware of any studies that specifically addressed the issue. He was aware of instances where, as a result of things noticed by the Division of Elections where charges and prosecution had been brought, which would indicate it was something the Division of Elections was taking seriously. He stated the division would be better able to speak to its internal operations.

Representative Bynum clarified that he was not saying fraud was occurring, but through testimony given in the presentation there was an implication that putting a security measure in place would be irrational because there was no such fraud occurring. He stated that if the Division of Elections, Department of Law, and the state's chief law enforcement was not actively looking for or being employed

to look for fraud, it was hard to determine whether it was occurring. He found it to be irrelevant whether there was fraud occurring and he stressed the importance of secure elections. He highlighted that there were security measures in place in all kinds of facets of people's lives to prevent bad things from happening, not because they were necessarily happening. He used banks as an example and explained there was security, not because they were getting robbed every day, but measures were put in place to ensure people were kept safe. He noted it was also the reason police officers were on the street. He emphasized that elections were one of the most sacred things people participated in and having confidence in them was very important.

Representative Bynum discussed the voting process. He remarked that when he went to his polling place he provided his ID, he signed the book, and voted. He noted that if he did not have some of the things he needed, he signed a question ballot and then it was looked into. He elaborated that if he voted incorrectly, the elections person told him there was a problem with his ballot and he was given another ballot. He believed he could do that three times. He highlighted that there were numerous measures in place to verify a person was who they said they were when voting in person. He addressed offering the same security for individuals who could not be there in person to vote. He thought it was reasonable to give individuals who could not vote in person the chance to fix their ballots if there was a problem and investigate a crime if it occurred. He referenced security measures such as signature verification that were not included in the bill due to cost reasons. He did not find it unreasonable to want secure elections. He had numerous questions on many of the bill sections that he planned to ask the following day. His current remarks were meant to address the idea that just because we do not think there may be fraudulent events occurring that we do not have security measures in place.

[8:44:56 PM](#)

Representative Bynum referenced a handout provided to the committee. He asked if Mr. Dunsmore had an opportunity to verify the handout that appeared to be from the Division of Elections.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that he had a chance to look at it but had not had an opportunity to verify it. He noted the numbers looked accurate to him. He also had more granular data from recent elections by district that a coworker in his office had prepared. He replied to Representative Bynum's comments about election security and stated it was a point well taken about the need for election security. He stated it was the reason the bill passed by the Senate contained numerous election security provisions. He detailed that the bill made voter ID requirements stricter and removed the use of a hunting/fishing license.

Representative Bynum referenced a document in members' packets from the Division of Elections (copy on file). He noted there had been a discussion pertaining to the witness signature. He observed that it was being said that 52 people were disenfranchised because their ballots were rejected due to the absence of a witness signature. He noted it was obviously possible to verify the data. He asked if the Division of Elections conducted any kind of investigation to determine whether the ballots had been accurately submitted. He asked if the individuals had been contacted by the division.

Mr. Dunsmore replied that the number on the document he had received was 512. He stated it would be necessary to ask the Division of Elections what it did. He suspected the division did not have the resources to reach out to over 500 Alaskans.

Representative Bynum remarked that he was looking specifically at regions 3 and 4.

Mr. Dunsmore apologized and noted it was late, and he was doing math in his head. He did not know the answer and suspected the division did not have the resources to contact all of the voters.

Co-Chair Schrage thought the Division of Elections and thought perhaps Ms. Beecher could weigh in on the questions.

Ms. Beecher asked for a repeat of the question.

Representative Bynum complied. The document from the division showed that the ballots of 52 individuals in regions 3 and 4 had been rejected because they did not have

a witness signature. He asked if the division had done any investigation on the ballots and any other ballots rejected due to witness signature and determine whether they were validly cast ballots.

Ms. Beecher replied that when absentee ballots went through review if they were missing one of the elements that would code them to be rejected, it [the lack of a witness signature] would be one of the rejection codes used. She stated there could be other things that were deficient with the ballot envelope, but if the lack of a witness signature would likely be the first thing the review board would see, which would lead to the rejection of the ballot. An investigation did not take place afterwards, but the voter would be notified about the reason their ballot had not been counted.

Representative Bynum asked if the division kept track of any contact it received from a voter who may have received a notice because their ballot was rejected because it did not have a witness signature.

Ms. Beecher replied in the negative.

Representative Bynum did not want to see ballots getting rejected because there was no witness signature if it was not an effective measure to prevent fraud or to prevent an improper ballot from being submitted. He remarked that a ballot without a witness signature was not being rejected because the state was trying to limit a person's ability to vote, but because the process was not followed. He believed it was necessary to have a conversation about what the process was. He stated that earlier testimony had been given by Mr. Dunsmore that it was an injustice to people. He believed the injustice was that there was not a system in place that allowed people to easily follow the process.

[8:51:50 PM](#)

Representative Allard thought Ms. Beecher had stated that the Division of Elections stopped looking for anything else wrong with the ballot if there was no witness signature. She found that interesting. She was curious how many ballots had been received with no signature on either of the lines. She found it concerning. She remarked that there was nothing in place "to help people prevent them from not being able to vote." She stated that the Municipality of

Anchorage worked hard to make sure signature verification was in place. She stressed the importance of having something in place to verify [voter] signatures if the witness signature requirement was removed. She stated she would have many questions the following day and would already know the answers, but she wondered if the answers provided would match hers.

Co-Chair Foster discussed the schedule for the following day. He recessed the meeting to 8:00 a.m. the following day [the committee would continue to hear SB 64. See separate minutes dated 5/16/25 9:00 a.m.].

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

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