

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
May 16, 2025
8:17 a.m.

8:17:45 AM

[Note: meeting is a continuation of the 5/15/25 1:30 p.m. meeting. See separate minutes for detail.]

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Foster called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 8:17 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

David Dunsmore, Staff, Representative Bill Wielechowski.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Carol Beecher, Director, Division of Elections.

SUMMARY

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 presentation on SB 64. The meeting was reconvened from the previous evening.

#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."

[8:19:33 AM](#)

Representative Stapp asked about section 12, page 9 of the bill and the proposed rural community liaison. He did not have an issue with the concept. He assumed that precincts and rural areas were already staffed. He asked for an explanation of why a special community liaison would be needed.

Representative Johnson asked which page was being referenced.

Representative Stapp referenced page 9, lines 1 through 5.

[8:21:05 AM](#)

DAVID DUNSMORE, STAFF, REPRESENTATIVE BILL WIELECHOWSKI, explained that the rural community liaison position had been requested by the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN). He relayed that staffing voting in rural Alaska had unique challenges that were not faced in urban Alaska. He mentioned urban communities with multiple precincts that had redundancy to cover positions. He maintained that it

was more difficult in a rural precinct, and if a poll worker was unable to come it could result in delayed or closed polling places. He contended that there needed to be preparation to ensure staff was recruited and trained. He thought a full-time position dedicated to addressing the issues would help the state be better prepared and ensure voting was accessible in all regions.

Co-Chair Foster noted that there were people online to answer questions.

Representative Allard stated that she was distributing a flyer regarding the special needs ballot, which had come from the Division of Elections.

Representative Stapp noted that the position was listed as a range 16 in the fiscal note, which he did not think was a very high range for what was discussed. He thought it would be good to hear from the division of elections. He mentioned a couple of precincts in the North Slope Borough that had not opened on time on an election day.

[8:25:04 AM](#)

CAROL BEECHER, DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF ELECTIONS, (via teleconference) responded that in the primary election there were several precincts that did not open due to polling workers not being available that day. She relayed that range 16 positions were helping with staffing of polling places for all the regions. She noted that in region 4, agreements were signed during the summer but nearer to polling time the individuals sometimes were not available at the last minute. In some instances the division had not found out until the day before elections.

Ms. Beecher described making an agreement with Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) whereby the division trained and sent DMVA staff to various hub communities to be ready to travel to locations that needed poll workers to open the polls for the general election. She recounted sending two workers to Egegik. On the morning of election day, the division found that the individual signed up for Wales would not be available. Weather made it impossible to send a poll worker, and the division found a teacher that was able to open the polls in the afternoon. She pondered whether a special liaison would help the matter, and thought it was possible but was dependent upon

the communities being engaged and having people willing to do the work. She surmised that the division could hire and train people, but it was not possible to foresee if the individuals would be there at the assigned time, thus the development of the contingency plan.

Co-Chair Foster noted that a few of the communities mentioned were in his district the previous election, and he was made aware on the day of the election that some of the polls could not open. He was appreciative of the efforts of the division. He mentioned the staff from DMVA in Nome being available. He commented on the challenge with over 200 villages in the state.

[8:29:48 AM](#)

Representative Stapp asked for clarification of the reference to Egegik versus Igiugig in Ms. Beechers discussion. He asked if the DMVA staff were defense force folks. He mentioned the teacher in Wales and was curious if the avenue could be explored since there were schools in every community.

Ms. Beecher repeated the village name as Egegik, where the division had deployed two individuals from DMVA. She confirmed that the individuals were regular staff and not any kind of military. She relayed that the division had not explored the concept of teachers as poll workers. She mentioned school hours.

Representative Allard followed up on Representative Stapp's remarks. She thought it was great that the DMVA staff were working. She mentioned the Alaska State Defense Force (ASDF) as an alternative source of poll workers.

Representative Johnson echoed Representative Allard's comment about ASDF. She asked if there was a prohibition against having a cooperative effort with other state workers in the area.

Ms. Beecher responded that the division currently used state workers to work polls, and there was no prohibition. The employees still earned their daily rate in addition to a poll worker hourly rate.

Representative Bynum referenced the proposed community liaison position, and thought the department was looking

for solutions. He referenced Section 57 of the bill that spoke to doing an evaluation and report and considered how to get better responses in rural communities and low-income neighborhoods. He asked Ms. Beecher to discuss what the division was currently doing to address the issue. He asked if the division was currently doing the report referenced in Section 57.

[8:34:46 AM](#)

Ms. Beecher responded that the division was looking at innovative ideas of how to transmit election results. She mentioned the ability to scan. She mentioned that early voting ballots were not tallied until election night, which was only possible with the ability to scan. She mentioned bandwidth and staffing issues. The division was considering Starlink and other ideas that might be a great solution for far-flung communities.

Representative Bynum discussed the issue of getting volunteers. He asked what the department's primary role was in trying to get volunteers and get ahead of the problem before the next election.

Ms. Beecher responded that traditionally the division called on people that had worked the previous election, who in turn contacted others to be poll workers. The division scheduled training throughout the summer in rural precincts. The poll workers were normally scheduled for working the primary and general elections (and sometimes REAA elections) in the summer. The division had found it difficult to get the workers since the Covid-19 pandemic, as many had been retired or older individuals. She noted that struggling to find poll workers was not isolated to rural communities. She relayed that the division would be expanding the notification that the division were looking for poll workers and not just leaving it to the poll workers to try to find people. She mentioned using social media.

[8:39:29 AM](#)

Representative Hannan asked if she could expand on training for poll workers in summer. She asked about the length of the training and considered the complexity involved in volunteering for the polls.

Ms. Beecher responded that in areas like Anchorage, the training was usually a four-hour block. Depending upon duties assigned, some workers would receive extra training blocks. Training for rural areas also included separate training for bilingual outreach. Rural areas often had training that lasted a full day or day and a half. The division had done a workshop for handling the tablets that handled other languages. The training was only every other year and was comprehensive.

Representative Hannan asked about the division's positioning of DMVA employees to go out to rural areas. She asked if there was separate training or if the employees took the same training as other poll workers.

Ms. Beecher was not certain and offered to follow up. She noted that there was online training available and there was some training that could only happen in person.

[8:43:09 AM](#)

Co-Chair Foster spoke to the value of the rural liaison position proposed in the bill. He discussed events on election day and observed that over the past two elections, it was clear how challenging things could get. He noted that Nome alone covered a huge geographic swath. He emphasized that there were over 200 small communities in the state. He contemplated that if four or five communities in the state had an issue on election day, it would be nice to have someone there to ensure the process was done securely. He referenced the day Wales had issues, when the weather had been challenging. He thought the position would be helpful.

Representative Bynum thought creating the rural community liaison position was a reasonable position to have. He asked if the person was expected to be effectively readily available to do all the technical correspondence involved with an election. He knew that communications capabilities had been expanded in the recent decade and mentioned fiber and low orbit satellite connections.

Ms. Beecher responded that the division currently had technical people who were very familiar with the equipment in hubs, and were available for phone calls to troubleshoot machinery. The employees tended to be very busy on election day.

Representative Bynum pondered the technical aspects of election day and wondered if the department was readily available to answer technical questions from rural communities.

[8:47:37 AM](#)

Ms. Beecher responded that the current process was that the poll workers were in communication with the division frequently leading up to the election. When there had been any kind of problem, workers called into their region where there were people answering phones to address questions. The division had not fleshed out all the responsibilities of the proposed liaison position, but she anticipated that the person would be made available as part of the group of people available for technical questions.

Representative Jimmie asked when the division of elections was last sued for violating the Voting Rights Act in relation to language assistance for indigenous voters.

Ms. Beecher responded that the last lawsuit was in 2012 [Toyukak v. Dahlstrom was a was voting rights case successfully brought against the state in 2013].

Representative Jimmie asked what adjustments were made due to the outcome of the case.

MS. Beecher relayed that as a result of the lawsuit, the state was in continuing settlement. She described that every couple of years the division went back to the court to see if there were changes or updates to the settlement. She described that the settlement was very prescriptive and had many defined requirements for the division with regard to provision for the Yupik language and dialects.

Representative Jimmie asked if the settlement remained in effect past 2026.

Ms. Beecher answered affirmatively and noted that it was an ongoing settlement.

[8:50:59 AM](#)

Co-Chair Foster relayed that there was another meeting at 9 o'clock, and the committee would be adjourning soon.

Representative Bynum referenced Section 18 of the bill which addressed informing voters of language assistance. He asked about accessibility of language information and ballot information and asked what kind of coordination the division was engaging in with villages and specifically with tribes. He wondered what kind of communication the division was having with the tribes.

Ms. Beecher responded that as a result of the Toyukak case, the division had a language program with a coordinator and translator. The division was in the process of hiring an outreach coordinator in the language management group. In relation to tribes and municipalities under the settlement umbrella, the division reached out to find translators. Without recommendations from the tribes and municipalities, the division reached out further to colleges and other communities. She shared that the process was year-round. The division had a glossary of the various Yupik dialects and worked to make it clearer over time. She noted that for an election year, initiatives had to be translated, and the official election pamphlet had to be translated. She noted that the election for 2024 was only translated into Bristol Bay Yupik and Central Yupik. She expressed appreciation for the enormous amount of labor the translators did. She relayed that there was continuing communication with the tribes in many ways. The materials were sent to tribes and communication was ongoing.

Representative Bynum contemplated the legislature providing money for the division and complying with federal law. He asked if the division was able to articulate what it was doing to comply with federal law, who it was coordinating with at the tribes, what feedback the division was getting from the process, and what other resources were needed.

[8:55:14 AM](#)

Ms. Beecher responded that the division was required to provide a court report as part of the settlement. Every year the division compiled documentation of different outreaches and responses. She thought the report might address Representative Bynum's question about tracking what the division was doing with the language program and case. She clarified that the division did not provide a court report pertaining to the other languages including Inupiaq and Tagalog.

Representative Bynum asked if the department had communication from the tribes and the communities regarding requests and issues. He thought the department was working on issues it was trying to solve. He wondered about issues or concerns raised by tribes or communities.

Ms. Beecher responded that the division sent out surveys and took the information that was received in response. She had not heard back concerning complaints regarding the languages.

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

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

ADJOURNMENT

[8:58:48 AM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 a.m.