

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 5, 2025

3:17 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Zack Fields, Co-Chair
Representative Carolyn Hall, Co-Chair
Representative Ashley Carrick
Representative Robyn Niayuq Burke (via teleconference)
Representative Dan Saddler
Representative Julie Coulombe
Representative David Nelson

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): CHILD CARE IN ALASKA

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 57

"An Act relating to wireless telecommunications devices in public schools; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED CSHB 57(L&C) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 49

"An Act relating to tobacco, tobacco products, electronic smoking products, nicotine, and products containing nicotine; raising the minimum age to purchase, exchange, or possess tobacco, a product containing nicotine, or an electronic smoking product; relating to the tobacco use education and cessation fund; relating to the taxation of electronic smoking products and vapor products; and providing for an effective date."

- BILL HEARING CANCELED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 57

SHORT TITLE: COMMUNICATION DEVICES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) FIELDS

01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	L&C, EDC
01/29/25	(H)	L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
01/29/25	(H)	Heard & Held
01/29/25	(H)	MINUTE (L&C)
01/31/25	(H)	L&C AT 9:15 AM GRUENBERG 120
01/31/25	(H)	Heard & Held
01/31/25	(H)	MINUTE (L&C)
02/05/25	(H)	L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

KATI CAPOZZI, President/CEO
 Alaska Chamber of Commerce
 Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered the Child Care in Alaska presentation.

DR. PEARL BOWERS, President/CEO
 Ukpeaġvik Iñupiat Corporation
 Utqiaġvik, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered the Child Care in Alaska presentation.

RACHEL BYERS, Executive Director
 Little Bears Playhouse
 Girdwood, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered the Child Care in Alaska presentation.

CHRISTINA EUBANKS OHANA, Executive Director
 Hillcrest Children's Center
 Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered the Child Care in Alaska presentation.

TESSA OLYMPIA, Apprenticeship Program Manager
 Southeast Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered the Child Care in Alaska presentation.

JIM MINNERY, President
 Alaska Family Council
 Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 57.

DEENA BISHOP, Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As an invited testifier, answered questions during the hearing on HB 57.

DAVE BOOTH, Principal
Palmer High School
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As an invited testifier, answered questions during the hearing on HB 57.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:17:09 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ZACK FIELDS called the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:17 p.m. Representatives Nelson, Saddler, Burke (via teleconference), Hall, and Fields were present at the call to order. Representatives Coulombe and Carrick arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION(S): Child Care in Alaska

[3:17:24 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS announced that the first order of business would be the Child Care in Alaska presentation.

[3:17:53 PM](#)

KATI CAPOZZI, President/CEO, Alaska Chamber, as an invited testifier, began the Child Care in Alaska presentation, via a PowerPoint, titled "How Childcare Impacts Alaska's Workforce Productivity and the State Economy: Untapped Potential in Alaska" [hard copy included in committee file]. She explained that the Alaska Chamber is the state's largest business advocacy organization, with the mission of promoting a healthy business environment in Alaska. She asserted that the lack of affordable and accessible child care in Alaska is one of the largest barriers to participation in the workforce. She stated that approximately 50,000 adults in Alaska rely on child care to participate in the labor force. She stressed that child care access in Alaska is at a critical level, with continuous labor shortages and one in five licensed child care providers closing

since 2022. She stated that employers across the state report struggles to recruit and retain employees, because child care options are too expensive or unavailable. According to slide 6 of the presentation, which highlights the Untapped Potential Report, child care-related absences and employee turnover cost the Alaska economy approximately \$165 million annually in lost productivity and wages. She asserted that challenges finding accessible and affordable child care disproportionately impact working parents, particularly women, who often have no choice but to reduce working hours or leave the workforce altogether to provide child care. A survey recently conducted by the Alaska Chamber found that 19 percent of parents missed work, and 12 percent of parents chose not to work due to a lack of affordable or accessible child care.

MS. CAPOZZI explained that child care in Alaska is among the most expensive in the nation. She noted that the average cost for full-time care for an infant is approximately \$21,000 a year. In many households facing this large cost, one parent will leave the workforce. She concluded that access to quality child care is neither a partisan nor social issue, but a business issue. She mentioned appreciation for efforts in past legislatures to pass legislation adopting tax credits for child care facilities.

[3:21:55 PM](#)

PEARL BOWERS, PhD, President/CEO, Ukpeaġvik Iñupiat Corporation (UIC), as an invited testifier, continued the Child Care in Alaska presentation. She explained that the UIC is the eighth largest company by revenue in Alaska, owned by stakeholders in Utqiagvik. Dr. Bowers reiterated the statements regarding workforce shortages and a lack of child care making it impossible for parents to return to work. She shared that she had experienced the issue personally, as lack of child care in her hometown of Utqiagvik forced Dr. Bowers to relocate to Anchorage and currently prevents her from returning home. Further, she noted that the few child care programs in her hometown are full and have a long waitlist. As former president of Iļisaġvik College, Dr. Bowers ran an early learning center that doubled as a child care center. Unfortunately, the center closed after a couple years due to staffing challenges. Additionally, she noted that Iļisaġvik College received federal funding to support the creation of child care facilities in North Slope villages; however, due to lack of community workforce and infrastructure, the college was unable to open any facilities. She offered similar anecdotes from her Anchorage-

based staff struggling to find child care. She asserted that child care shortages endanger economic security for families, leave children at heightened risk of neglect, and make it difficult for companies to fill labor shortages. She concluded by urging legislators to create legislation to stabilize the child care sector in Alaska.

[3:25:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BURKE thanked Dr. Bowers for her testimony.

[3:26:08 PM](#)

RACHEL BYERS, Executive Director, Little Bears Playhouse, as an invited testifier, continued the Child Care in Alaska presentation. She stated that Little Bears Playhouse ("the Playhouse") has been operating for over 40 years and is the only licensed child care facility in Girdwood. She noted that they also provide care to children from the surrounding communities of Indian, Bird, Whittier, and Portage. She stated that the Playhouse has a daily capacity of 27 children, with 43 children enrolled, and about 30 children currently on waitlist - which typically takes 15-18 months. She stated that the Playhouse lacks the capacity to provide infant care, and many families, including hers, drive to Anchorage for infant care and back to Girdwood for work. She offered her belief that child care assists in creating the foundation for learning. She emphasized that the child care industry demands constant love, dedication, commitment, oversight, and ongoing professional development, which is typically done on a teacher's dollar and time. She further noted that many teachers spend countless hours developing curriculum, activities, and experiences. She stated that, in spite of the demanding requirements, some teachers are paid less than fast food workers.

MS. BYERS reported that the Playhouse provides one of the highest starting wages for child care staff, paid training hours and credentials, paid vacation, payment for all school closures, and free child care for staff with children. She also reported that tuition at the Playhouse is 15-20 percent lower than the average unsubsidized child care center in Anchorage. She said that the Playhouse struggles to remain competitive with Girdwood's largest employer [Alyeska Resort], which offers similar starting wages and health and retirement benefits. She admitted that Little Bears could not compete with that [health and retirement benefits] without raising tuition for families.

MS. BYERS stated that many of her staff start with little experience and knowledge of early childhood education. She stated that the Playhouse is dedicated to continuing and higher education for staff. She reported that about half of her staff have earned their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and the remainder of her staff are college-educated. She stated that Little Bears Playhouse, like many child care centers across the nation, struggles to find staff, staff struggle to find housing, and families struggle to pay tuition.

MS. BYERS noted that the Playhouse received a generous land donation from (indesc.) and has begun the construction of an 8,000 square foot learning center in Girdwood, that will allow for the enrollment of 1,200 students and for afterschool care. She concluded that without local, state, and federal assistance, child care in Alaska could collapse.

[3:31:05 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR HALL asked how Ms. Byers is able to provide benefits to her employees and a high-quality learning environment for the children enrolled.

[3:31:30 PM](#)

MS. BYERS responded that Little Bears Playhouse is a nonprofit organization. Since taking over as executive director, Ms. Byers reported that they Little Bears Playhouse has received over \$200,000 in grants and donations totaling \$50,000 over the past two years. She noted that the Playhouse hosts fundraisers every year. She stated that she is not able to provide health or retirement benefits to her staff, as she is "breaking even."

[3:32:18 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR HALL asked about the range of tuition costs.

[3:32:32 PM](#)

MS. BYERS responded that tuition ranges from \$1,100-1,300 a month for "full-time preschool down to older infants." She also added that tuition expenses could vary depending on enrollment status, with some part-time students paying approximately \$450 a month.

[3:33:15 PM](#)

CHRISTINA EUBANKS OHANA, Executive Director, Hillcrest Children's Center, as an invited testifier, continued the Child Care in Alaska presentation. She reported that the child care industry received historic financial investment from the State of Alaska the prior year. She argued that funds for the child care industry should be secured in the base budget to help stabilize [child care] operations and increase the states capacity for quality, licensed child care. Unfortunately, she reported, child care programs in Anchorage are continuing to close or operate at less than full capacity. She maintained that a lack of consistent funding from both state and federal institutions makes it difficult for local providers to train and keep employees. She stated that many child care programs operate on tight budgets and very few can afford to keep several months of expenses for situations such as delayed state reimbursements. She explained that over 90 percent of funding for child care comes from federal sources, and that banks are less likely to extend lines of credit to child care programs, particularly if a substantial portion of their budget is reliant on federal funding.

MS. EUBANKS OHANA additionally stated that child care is a low-paying industry that relies heavily on immigrants to provide care. She reported that in her company, one-third of the workforce comes from unincorporated territories or are legal immigrants. She stated that there has been a decrease in applicants from these communities in the last two months, and that current employees have chosen to leave the country due to recently established U.S. immigration policies. She stated that her program is experiencing staffing shortages for the first time since 2022 and is unable to find qualified workers in Alaska willing to work at the wages that they can offer them.

MS. EUBANKS OHANA noted that there has also been an increase in children with special needs which require increased staff with specialized education. She stated that parents of children with increased medical needs face the greatest difficulty in retaining employment, because most programs cannot provide the type of specialized care that is required. Additionally, she noted that most families do not qualify for state funding meant to support children on child care assistance who need extra support.

MS. EUBANKS OHANA stated, on a positive note, that there has been an increase in businesses interested in partnering with child care facilities to qualify for a tax credit, as passed by during the Thirty-Third Alaska State Legislature. She

recommended that the tax credit be extended to other businesses that support access to child care, such as builders that include child care facilities in their project design and construction. Finally, she noted that Hillcrest Children's Center is working on developing an administrative apprenticeship program in Anchorage, which will increase the number of qualified child care administrators.

MS. EUBANKS OHANA concluded that the child care industry in Alaska must have access to reliable, ongoing funding to ensure the operation of current programs and to expand access to child care statewide. Finally, she stated that operational grants and stipends for child care educators address the high cost of child care in Alaska.

[3:36:50 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE stated that Anchorage licenses its own child care centers, instead of the state, unlike other communities in Alaska. She asked whether the City of Anchorage had received funds from a marijuana tax that was meant to go into the child care industry.

[3:37:32 PM](#)

MS. EUBANKS OHANA responded that the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) put out request for proposals (RFPs) looking for people to manage the grants. She explained that "one part" would provide a small operational stipend for programs and another would cover the cost of child care for employees within the MOA. She reported that funds would be released in July of 2025.

[3:38:11 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE offered her belief that the marijuana tax would be a stable source of funding for child care centers. She asked whether the MOA has made it easier or harder to go through red tape.

[3:38:45 PM](#)

MS. EUBANKS OHANA responded that there has been little change. She reported that the MOA's allowance for variances for ratio and group size in school age care to align with state recommendations has been a positive change. Additionally, Ms. Eubanks Ohana noted that she was working with providers to apply for the same variances for younger aged care.

[3:39:32 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS asked for more details regarding Ms. Eubanks Ohana's suggestion that tax credits should apply to new construction.

[3:39:53 PM](#)

MS. EUBANKS OHANA offered her understanding that the current tax credit reimburses employers who directly fund their employees' child care. She stated that the tax credit should be extended to construction companies/builders/developers who incorporate spaces for licensed child care in their construction.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS opined that Ms. Eubanks Ohana's suggestion is a great idea.

[3:40:44 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE offered her understanding that the tax credit does currently include facilities/businesses with licensed child care spaces. She clarified that Ms. Eubanks Ohana was referring to extending the tax credit to the contractors who would be constructing spaces for licensed child care.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS confirmed that was correct.

[3:41:47 PM](#)

TESSA OLYMPIA, Apprenticeship Program Manager, Southeast Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children (SEAAEYC), as an invited testifier, finished the Child Care in Alaska presentation. She stated that SEAAEYC has served as the child care resource and referral agency for Southeast Alaska for over 40 years. She stated that child care is essential infrastructure for working families in Alaska's economy. She asserted that local investment drives solutions, referencing three new child care facilities that have opened in the last 18 months due to grants provided by the City & Borough of Juneau (CBJ). She added that wages have increased in participating programs, with pay starting between \$20 and \$25 hourly. Additionally, she noted that other Southeast communities are looking to create similar dedicated funds to invest in their local child care systems.

MS. OLYMPIA stated that a statewide solution requires the state to play a role in supporting and scaling investments into child care. She had two recommendations for state action. First, she recommended the establishment of a state match for local child care investments through pooled funding. She suggested that a local, economically focused nonprofit could manage the funds, such as the Alaska Community Foundation, the Alaska Municipal League, or a regional economic development council. She explained that the state would commit annual funding, while businesses and corporations could contribute additional funding. The fund would allow communities to invest in direct operating grants for child care access matching state funds. She stated that many businesses want to invest in child care, but do not have the means to establish onsite programs. She asserted that a pooled fund would allow businesses to contribute to a shared solution, even if they are not able to provide child care onsite at their facilities.

MS. OLYMPIA further recommended meaningful investment in the child care workforce. She argued that policy change/investment in increasing supply would not be successful without a long-term strategy to build and retain the child care workforce. She argued that child care must be recognized as a skilled trade and fund pathways to reach education requirements. Apprenticeship programs are a proven strategy that provide a structured path to gain on the job experience, earn early childhood education credits, and advance in the field. She maintained that the expansion of a statewide apprenticeship program would create a stable, skilled workforce in Alaska. She noted that SEAAEYC is ready for expansion statewide. She concluded by stating that the child care industry in Alaska needs a strong coordinated partnership between businesses, state, and local governments.

[3:45:22 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether raising standards for professional training and qualifications for child care workers might also increase the cost of child care.

[3:45:56 PM](#)

MS. OLYMPIA offered her belief that maintaining an educated workforce should not change the cost of child care. She noted that the cost of child care is already very high, with parents already struggling to pay the cost. She noted that if workers are more skilled, wages should be increased. She suggested

pooled funding as a means to increase wages collaboratively for child care workers.

[3:46:27 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS offered his understanding that the standards for child care training have not increased; rather, he stated that the SEAAEYC has created a new training pathway to reach preexisting training requirements. Additionally, he asked Ms. Olympia to explain the process of the apprenticeship program.

[3:46:55 PM](#)

MS. OLYMPIA explained that apprentices work 40 hours a week and need to earn a minimum of 2,000 hours [typically 18-24 months, working approximately 40 hours a week]. She stated that apprentices earn an occupational endorsement certificate in infant and toddler development through online courses at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). She stated that all apprentices, while going through courses, are assigned a mentor. She announced that the very first cohort of child care apprentices in Juneau would be graduating in May [2025].

[3:47:49 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS stated that, historically, there has been a problematic structure in which child care providers were required to be trained through the System for Early Education and Development (SEED) program, in which providers were regularly unpaid. He asked Ms. Olympia to speak to ways in which the apprenticeship does not allow unpaid training.

[3:48:21 PM](#)

MS. OLYMPIA stated that the apprenticeship program is registered through the Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DLWD). She explained that one requirement of the program is wage increases over time, with providers receiving a raise upon completion of coursework and continuing education. Additionally, she noted that providers move up through SEED levels with completion of coursework.

[3:48:54 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS thanked the invited testifiers for their presentation and advocacy work. He offered his agreement with Ms. Capozzi and opined that the legislature should work to

quickly pass the legislation introduced by Representative Coulombe during the Thirty-Third Alaska State Legislature to preserve stability in the structure of the tax.

HB 57-COMMUNICATION DEVICES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

[3:49:27 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 57, "An Act relating to wireless telecommunications devices in public schools; and providing for an effective date." [Before the committee, adopted as a working document on 1/31/25, was the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 57, Version 34-LS0064\N, Bergerud, 1/28/25 ("Version N").]

[3:49:37 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS opened public testimony on HB 57.

[3:50:12 PM](#)

JIM MINNERY, President, Alaska Family Council, testified in support of HB 57. He stated that the Alaska Family Council is a faith-based public policy group that addresses issues related to "life, marriage, parental authority, gender and human design, religious freedom, and constitutional government." He stated that there is a lot of support for HB 57 across the political spectrum, from pro-life groups, parental rights groups, the National Education Association (NEA), and teacher groups. He addressed an area of opposition regarding parents' desire to access students during the school day via cell phone, particularly in the event of an emergency. He stated that he read an article that argued that cell phone use in the event of an emergency could be dangerous. He offered his support for HB 57.

[3:52:48 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 57.

[3:53:26 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BURKE moved to adopt Amendment 1 to HB 57, Version N, labeled 34-LS0064\N.2, Bergerud, 1/31/25, which read as follows:

Page 1, line 10:
Following "device":
Insert "for medical purposes,"
Following "emergency":
Insert ",,"

Page 2, line 4:
Following "device":
Insert "for medical purposes,"
Following "emergency":
Insert ",,"

[3:53:33 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS objected for the purpose of discussion.

[3:53:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BURKE offered her belief that the current language did not appropriately address students who use their phone for medical purposes. She explained that a diabetic student might use their cell phone as a monitoring device for glucose levels. She offered her belief that the language "emergency" does not adequately support students who, for medical purposes, may need to have their phone on their person at all times.

[3:54:29 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked for clarification on whether the desire was to allow exemptions for emergencies and medical needs or to allow exemptions for emergency medical needs.

[3:55:02 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BURKE clarified that the intent is to allow for a student to have their phone on their person for the purpose of monitoring medical conditions.

[3:55:57 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER offered an apology and stated that he had misread the amendment.

[3:56:24 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR FIELDS removed his objection to the motion to adopt Amendment 1 to HB 57, Version N.

[3:56:35 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER objected.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether there would be limitations to the medical exemptions.

[3:57:10 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BURKE stated that it would need to be a documented medical condition that required accommodations. She supposed that the parents and students would need to identify to the school that need for accommodation.

[3:58:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON asked about the intent for the process of declaring accommodations to be eligible for medical exceptions under Amendment 1 to HB 57, Version N.

[3:58:26 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE BURKE responded that the school districts would determine the process through which a student would need to apply for accommodations. She offered her assumption that parents would declare medical accommodations annually during enrollment periods. She stated that it is not her intention to prescribe that process through the amendment.

CO-CHAIR FIELDS suggested that could be addressed in regulation, and with guidance from the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED).

[3:59:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER voiced concern that parents might falsify their children's medical needs in order to access them via cell phones during the school day.

[4:00:31 PM](#)

DEENA BISHOP, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, responded that a student would need an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), or a 504 plan, in order

to qualify for exemptions to the cell phone ban. Additionally, she noted that current policies require documentation of such needs and are kept by the school's recording office.

COMMISSIONER BISHOP, in response to a follow-up question from Representative Saddler, explained that a 504 plan is for a student that does not have a learning disability but may need other accommodations, such as a student with cochlear implants who needs hearing support.

[4:01:53 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER removed his objection to the motion to adopt Amendment 1 to HB 57, Version N. There being no further objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[4:02:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON asked Mr. Booth how the cell phone ban at Palmer High School is enforced. He asked whether there are inconsistent levels of enforcement from teachers, and if so, how that is handled by the school.

[4:02:59 PM](#)

DAVE BOOTH, Principal, Palmer High School (PHS), as an invited testifier, responded that, after implementing the cell phone ban at Palmer High School, he appointed enforcement to the school administrators, not the teachers. He stated that an administrator was appointed to check in during every class, during every period. He offered his belief that teachers should not become disciplinarians in the classroom, as it might affect their relationship with their students. Further, he noted that the expectations placed on the students were very clear regarding cell phone usage.

[4:04:24 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON asked what the average punishment was for students who had phones on them for a first-time offense versus repeated offenses.

[4:04:47 PM](#)

MR. BOOTH responded that there is a progressive punitive system. He explained that when a phone is turned into the office for the first time, a parent is asked to come and pick it up. On the

second offense, the phone is required to be locked in a Yonder Phone Pouch for a period of time. He explained that for students with repeated infractions, the phone is taken at the beginning of the day and returned at the end of the day. He noted that PHS currently does not have any students who fall under the last category and reiterated that students are responsive to clear expectations and enforcement.

[4:06:28 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON asked whether children make excuses that they are allowed to have their cell phones as dictated by their parents.

[4:07:04 PM](#)

MR. BOOTH responded that PHS uses 504 plans. He noted that they review 504 plans during the enrollment process. He noted that parents are very understanding. He commented that PHS has no issues with children on documented 504 plans inappropriately using their devices.

[4:08:00 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER stated that the fiscal note for bill is zero. He acknowledged that there would be no direct cost to the department to develop a policy regarding cell phone use. He predicted that there will likely be costs down the road, particularly with the implementation of a cell phone ban. He also anticipated costs from legal implications of a cell phone ban, noting that a parent might argue that a cell phone ban infringes on their First Amendment rights by not allowing parents to contact their children during the school day.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER agreed with prior testimony stating that attention is essential to education, the value of which outweighs the entertainment value of phones. He offered his belief that a cell phone ban is a heavy-handed response, but the testimony had indicated the severity of the situation. He stated that he would likely support the proposed legislation.

[4:09:48 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE offered her belief that there should be no cell phones in schools. She offered her concern regarding local control. She offered her understanding that, under HB 57, [Version N], the state would write a model policy, and schools

have the option of adopting the model policy or writing their own policy. She asked how much flexibility the school districts would be allowed, should the district elect to write its own policy. Further, she asked whether there would be consequences for not adopting a policy.

[4:11:01 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER BISHOP responded that there are statutes that allow for DEED to enforce law. She remarked that DEED would first communicate with schools regarding any failure of policy adoption to identify any barriers to the adoption of a policy. She asserted that the adoption of a statewide policy would make enforcement among local schools easier. Further, she noted that local educators could [place blame] on [DEED] as the disciplinarians and allow students to maintain positive relationships with their teachers, should there be any opposition locally to a cell phone ban. She opined that Mr. Booth is doing what DEED should be doing.

[4:12:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE COULOMBE commented that she is disappointed in the school districts for not tackling the issue at the local level and thanked the commissioner for her work on the subject.

[4:13:15 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK echoed Representative Saddler in believing that the legislation was heavy-handed but stated that the dialogue during committee hearings helped her realize the scale of the issue.

[4:14:09 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR HALL moved to report CSHB 57, Version 34-LS0064\N, Bergerud, 1/28/25, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

[4:14:21 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON objected.

[4:14:25 PM](#)

[A roll call vote was started and voided.]

[4:15:04 PM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives Carrick, Coulombe, Saddler, Hall, and Fields voted in favor of the motion to report CSHB 57, Version 34-LS0064\N, Bergerud, 1/28/25, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. Representative Nelson voted against it. [Representative Burke was teleconferenced and could not vote on the motion.] Therefore, CSHB 57(L&C) was reported out of the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee by a vote of 5-1.

[4:15:43 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 4:15 p.m.