

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

March 27, 2025

3:18 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Ashley Carrick, Chair
Representative Andi Story, Vice Chair
Representative Rebecca Himschoot
Representative Ky Holland
Representative Kevin McCabe
Representative Elexie Moore

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Sarah Vance

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 58

"An Act relating to the office of public advocacy; and relating to the public advocate."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 35

"An Act relating to the use and possession of electronic devices by prisoners."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 16

"An Act amending campaign contribution limits for state and local office; directing the Alaska Public Offices Commission to adjust campaign contribution limits for state and local office once each decade beginning in 2031; and relating to campaign contribution reporting requirements."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 104

"An Act creating and relating to the address confidentiality program; and providing for an effective date."

- BILL HEARING CANCELED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 58

SHORT TITLE: OPA: PUBLIC ADVOCATE APPOINTMENT

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) FIELDS

01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	CRA, STA
03/11/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/11/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/11/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/13/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/13/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/13/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/18/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/18/25	(H)	Moved HB 58 Out of Committee
03/18/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/21/25	(H)	CRA RPT 4DP 1NR
03/21/25	(H)	DP: HOLLAND, HALL, HIMSCHOOT, MEARS
03/21/25	(H)	NR: PRAX
03/27/25	(H)	STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 35

SHORT TITLE: PRISONERS: ELECTRONIC DEVICE ACCESS/USE

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) HIMSCHOOT

01/22/25	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	CRA, STA
02/20/25	(H)	CRA AT 9:00 AM BARNES 124
02/20/25	(H)	Heard & Held
02/20/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
02/25/25	(H)	CRA AT 9:00 AM BARNES 124
02/25/25	(H)	Heard & Held
02/25/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
02/27/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
02/27/25	(H)	Scheduled but Not Heard
03/13/25	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/13/25	(H)	Moved CSHB 35(CRA) Out of Committee
03/13/25	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
03/14/25	(H)	CRA RPT CS(CRA) 3DP 3AM
03/14/25	(H)	DP: HALL, MEARS, HIMSCHOOT
03/14/25	(H)	AM: HOLLAND, PRAX, RUFFRIDGE
03/27/25	(H)	STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 16

SHORT TITLE: CAMPAIGN FINANCE, CONTRIBUTION LIMITS

SPONSOR(s) : REPRESENTATIVE(s) SCHRAGE

01/22/25	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(H)	STA, FIN
03/27/25	(H)	STA AT 3:15 PM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HB 58.

BRANT MCGEE, Independent Law Practice Professional
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony in support of HB 58.

SUSANNE DIPIETRO, Executive Director
Alaska Judicial Council
Alaska Court System
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 58.

COURTNEY OWEN, Staff
Representative Zack Fields
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave the sectional analysis for HB 58 on behalf of Representative Fields, prime sponsor.

ELLA LUBIN, Staff
Representative Rebecca Himschoot
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave the sectional analysis for CSHB 35(CRA) on behalf of Representative Himschoot, prime sponsor.

TERI TIBBETT, Coordinator
Alaska Reentry Partnership
Co-Chair
Juneau Reentry Coalition
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As an invited testifier, gave a PowerPoint presentation during the hearing on CSHB 35(CRA).

BARBARA MONGAR, Coordinator
Mat-Su Reentry Coalition
Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony in support of CSHB 35 (CRA).

BOBBY DORTON, Consultant
Healing Homes
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony during the hearing on CSHB 35 (CRA).

APRIL WILKERSON, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Corrections
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information during the hearing on CSHB 35 (CRA).

REPRESENTATIVE CALVIN SCHRAGE
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HB 16.

AMANDA NDEMO, Staff
Representative Calvin Schrage
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a PowerPoint presentation of HB 16 on behalf of Representative Schrage, prime sponsor.

SHARMAN HALEY
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony during the hearing on HB 16.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:18:03 PM](#)

CHAIR ASHLEY CARRICK called the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:18 p.m. Representatives Moore, Holland, Himschoot, Story, and Carrick were present at the call to order. Representative McCabe arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 58-OPA: PUBLIC ADVOCATE APPOINTMENT

3:18:38 PM

CHAIR CARRICK announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 58, "An Act relating to the office of public advocacy; and relating to the public advocate."

3:19:11 PM

REPRESENTATIVE ZACH FIELDS, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 58. He said that he introduced the proposed bill when a constituent who had worked in the Office of Public Advocacy (OPA) explained that the selection of the head of OPA is very different from the selection process of the Alaska Public Defender Agency (PDA), despite having similar functions and work and many of the same types of legal cases. He opined that work associated with OPA was even more complex. He said the bill objective is to make the selection process of the director of OPA analogous to the selection process of the public defender in PDA. He commented that this probably should have been done 40 years ago. He clarified that the bill is not intended to criticize the current director of OPA but was intended to create a structural fix to the selection process.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS explained that OPA was established in 1984 by a bill that was put forward by the governor at the time. This office was established to provide legal advocacy and guardianship to vulnerable Alaskans. He said that often PDA and OPA are required to hire outside counsel in cases that involve a conflict of interest. He remarked that OPA provides crucial services for children, vulnerable individuals, and represents clients in a variety of civil and criminal matters. This includes advocacy for abused and neglected children, as well as protective proceedings regarding guardianship for incapacitated adults. He reaffirmed that OPA plays a role in these types of cases when a public defender can have a conflict of interest.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS reiterated that OPA was established in 1984 whereas PDA was formed in 1969. He explained that PDA provides constitutionally mandated legal representation to vulnerable clients, including legal representation in criminal cases. When looking at the work of both OPA and PDA, the scope of OPA's work is broader, but both agencies are essential for providing constitutionally required legal representation.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS explained that both agencies are similar in that they are both government agencies that provide legal services under the Department of Administration (DOA). They

both serve vulnerable Alaskans and, in some cases, represent clients in the same case. He noted that OPA provides these services to youth and elderly individuals. However, despite these similarities, the process for selecting each office's director differs substantially.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS explained that the public defender is appointed by the governor from a list of two or more candidates nominated by the Judicial Council. The prospective appointee is subject to confirmation by members of the Alaska State Legislature and serves a term of four years before reappointment. He noted that the governor may remove the public defender at any time. In contrast, the OPA director, though also appointed by the governor, is not subject to confirmation or term limits. However, like the public defender, the OPA director may be removed at the governor's discretion.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS, in conclusion, said that the selection processes for the two agencies differ, despite overlapping services provided by OPA and PDA. He reiterated that the OPA arguably has an even broader scope of practice.

CHAIR CARRICK announced the committee would hear invited testimony.

[3:23:41 PM](#)

BRANT MCGEE, Independent Law Practice Professional, began invited testimony in support of HB 58. He said he was the first public advocate, appointed in 1984, and served at OPA until 2003. He stated that the proposed legislation corrects a mistake dating back to the agency's creation in 1984. He added that adopting the same selection process as that of PDA is appropriate and expressed uncertainty about why it was never aligned.

MR. MCGEE explained that there were three reasons to accommodate the proposed changes to the appointment process in OPA. First, it would address potential conflicts of interest. Second, OPA can serve as the entity responsible for accountability. Third, the position does not involve policymaking or policy implementation. He noted that OPA's responsibilities are established by statute in the U.S. and Alaska Constitutions. He urged the committee to take these three reasons into consideration when evaluating the proposed legislation.

[3:28:33 PM](#)

SUSANNE DIPIETRO, Executive Director, Alaska Judicial Council, Alaska Court System, began invited testimony on HB 58 by explaining that the council was established in Article 4 of the Alaska State Constitution and its members include both lawyers and non-lawyers who are appointed without regard to political affiliation since the council is a nonpartisan body.

MS. DIPIETRO explained that the Alaska Judicial Council has several constitutional and statutory duties. She explained that one important duty would be the council's statutory duty to screen and nominate applicants to the position of public defender. She said that as Representative Fields had mentioned, the intent of the bill is to use the same nomination procedures for OPA as currently conducted with PDA.

MS. DIPIETRO discussed the process of nominating a public defender. First is the announcement of a vacancy, followed by solicitations from applicants. She said this is widely publicized; a letter is sent out to every lawyer in the state; press releases are put out; and information is posted on the Alaska Judicial Council's website. She said that this is a 5-week application process and included a 27-page application that asked for previous employers, education, legal experience, trial-practice experience, and any references that were previously affiliated with their work. They are also required to provide waivers to allow the council access to their confidential personnel files and their confidential bar-discipline records. At the close of this application process, the Alaska Judicial Council publicizes the names of people who have applied, and an electronic survey is sent to every member of the bar who may have had direct experience with the applicants to rate applicant qualifications. She said applicants are rated on several qualities that the council has found to be critical to these types of positions. These include legal ability, temperament, impartiality, fairness, integrity, and overall performance. The results of the survey are posted on the council's website for everyone to see.

MS. DIPIETRO said that during the application process, council staff are investigating all the information that the applicants provided. Contact is made to each legal employer that the person has worked for and requests feedback about their performance. The council also contacts references and other people who have been involved in litigation with the applicant; this could involve co-counsel, opposing council, or even as a judge in the case. These affiliates are asked to answer a

questionnaire providing detailed feedback about the applicant's performance.

MS. DIPIETRO said that the Alaska Judicial Council also conducts criminal-records checks, credit-history checks, and looks through those personnel files and bar-discipline files, and does other investigations as needed. Importantly, the council members listen to public comments throughout the process.

MS. DIPIETRO said that the council holds a public hearing on the applicants and a 45-minute interview is held for each applicant. Following the interviews, the council nominates the most qualified individuals in the group. She said the criteria used to determine "most qualified" include professional competence, diligence and administrative skills, integrity, fairness, temperament, judgement, common sense, legal and life experience, commitment, demonstrated commitment to the public and community service and a demonstrated commitment to equal justice and the legal needs of all communities in Alaska.

MS. DIPIETRO noted that at least two individuals are nominated for later confirmation processes and only the most qualified among the applicants were candidates following application procedures.

[3:34:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND said he recalled a lot of these details from previous discussions in the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee. He asked whether there were any changes to the proposed legislation since those previous discussions.

[3:35:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS responded that there had been no changes to the bill.

[3:35:20 PM](#)

COURTNEY OWEN, Staff, Representative Zack Fields, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Fields, prime sponsor, gave the sectional analysis for HB 58 [included in the committee file], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 1: Amends AS 13.26.750(a), changing the title from "COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATION" to "public advocate."

Section 2: Amends AS 36.30.305(a), changing the title from "DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC ADVOCACY" to "public advocate."

Section 3: Amends AS 36.30.850(b)(31), changing the title from "DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC ADVOCACY" to "public advocate."

Section 4: Amends AS 44.21.400 to read: (with reference to the "public advocacy office") "The office is administered by the public advocate."

Section 5: Amends AS 44.21 by adding a new section that reads: "Sec.44.21.405. Appointment, removal, and vacancy."

Subsection (a) directs the governor to appoint the public advocate for a term of four years, from persons nominated by the judicial council and subject to majority confirmation by the joint legislature. Retention of the public advocate requiring only similar legislative approval.

Subsection (b) lays out the removal process for the public advocate, a power held by the governor, who need only submit a report stating the reasons and notify the legislature of the report within 10 days after the convening of the regular session.

Subsection (c) required eligibility entails acquiring admittance to practice law in the State of Alaska.

NOTE: This mirrors the existing Sec. 44.21.430 (requiring employees of the public advocacy office to be licensed to practice law in the State of Alaska.

Subsection (d) during vacancy, the governor has discretionary authority to appoint an "acting public advocate" and the joint duty (with judicial council) to fill the vacancy as soon as possible.

Section 6: Amends AS 44.21.410(a)(7), changing the title from "COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATION" to "public advocate."

Section 7: Amends AS 44.21.410(b), changing the title from "COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATION" to "public

advocate" (and under (b)(1): "COMMISSIONER" to "public advocate").

Section 8: Amends AS 44.21.415(c), changing the title from "COMMISSIONER" to "public advocate."

Section 9: Amends AS 44.21.415(e), changing the title from "COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATION" to "public advocate."

Section 10: Amends AS 44.21.420, changing the title from "COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATION" in subsection (a) and "COMMISSIONER" in subsections (b), & (c), to "public advocate."

Section 11: The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section, titled: "TRANSITION" and to read:

Subsection (a): Provides for the continuity of all orders, regulations, contracts, rights, liabilities and obligations issued, created, or adopted by the predecessor to the envisioned public advocate (the commissioner of administration) and by the pre-existing law changed by this bill.

Subsection (b): Provides for the continuity of governance by allowing the individual employed as the director of the office of public advocacy on the day before the effective date of this Act to serve as the public advocate until the governor appoints a new public advocate.

[3:38:34 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that HB 58 was held over.

HB 35-PRISONERS: ELECTRONIC DEVICE ACCESS/USE

[3:38:44 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 35, "An Act relating to the use and possession of electronic devices by prisoners." [Before the committee was CSHB 35(CRA).]

[3:38:52 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 3:38 p.m. to 3:41 p.m.

3:41:16 PM

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT, as prime sponsor, presented CSHB 35(CRA). She explained that this bill concept has been around before and this was the third legislature that handled this topic. She said that the proposed legislation would bring Alaska into alignment with 48 other states that allow the use of electronic tablets in a Department of Corrections (DOC) facility. The goal of the bill is to reduce recidivism through additional access to training and family visitation. She said that it would help inmates learn how to use tablet devices as well, common tools in the public space. The goal is to allow inmates to leave corrections on a better footing to reduce the chances of returning to a correctional facility.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that security threats could be reduced with the proposed legislation. This includes increasing access to telehealth options and the reduction in transport to medical care facilities. She noted that a DOC pilot program was underway that allowed limited use of electronic tablets and reports indicated that it was having positive outcomes. She said that since this allowance has not been addressed in Alaska Statute (AS), DOC cannot provide electronic tablets to all the states correctional facilities. She said that the pilot program made determinations for how this tool could be deployed at a larger scale. She clarified that these electronic tablets were not free access to the Internet nor a luxury item that had games and other entertainment access. Access to library materials, training courses, telehealth, and family visitation is permitted. She said that she wanted to ensure that policies were in place to give DOC the latitude needed to provide these devices but with sufficient guardrails to ensure appropriate use amongst inmates.

3:44:38 PM

ELLA LUBIN, Staff, Representative Rebecca Himschoot, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Himschoot, prime sponsor, gave the sectional analysis for CSHB 35(CRA) [included in the committee file], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 1: Adds an exemption (I) to the prohibition against electronic devices for prisoners. It also adds television show ratings to the list of banned movie ratings. Subparagraph (I) adds additional accepted

uses for electronic devices including use for rehabilitative and case plan purposes, legal material access, health care access, or another purpose identified by the commissioner in regulation. Subparagraph (4) adds language that prohibits correctional centers from charging fees for electronic device use.

Section 2: States that electronic devices may not be used to replace in-person visitation.

Section 3: Adds clarifying language regarding the applicability of the effective date.

CHAIR CARRICK stated that the committee would hear invited testimony.

[3:46:31 PM](#)

TERI TIBBETT, Coordinator, Alaska Reentry Partnership; Co-Chair, Juneau Reentry Coalition, began invited testimony by talking about the coalition's purpose of helping people transition out of incarceration and back into the public community. She gave a PowerPoint presentation [hard copy included in the committee file], titled "Alaska Reentry Partnership Presentation to House State Affairs Committee - 3/27/25." She brought attention to slides 4 and 5, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

HB 35 - Access to Digital Technology in Prisons

- HB 35 removes a barrier in state law that restricts inmates inside correctional facilities from utilizing certain electronic devices—such as computers or digital tablets—for improved access to rehabilitative programming and activities.
- The Alaska Reentry Partnership supports efforts to expand digital technology in prisons for vocational training, education, treatment and recovery, reentry planning, housing and employment assistance, telehealth, peer support, faith-based, Tribal, visitation, and more.
- Rehabilitative programming increases the likelihood of success in the community after release. Successful reentry means safer communities.

- In today's world, people need to be 'digitally literate' for basic functioning—to fill out an application, apply for a job, banking, communication, and more. People who have been incarcerated for decades need basic digital skills to function in today's world.

- The Alaska Reentry Partnership supports DOC's efforts to improve digital infrastructure to best provide safe and secure access to telehealth, video teleconferencing, closed circuit education channels, digital tablets, computer labs, and more.

MS. TIBBIT brought attention to a graph on slide 6, titled "Offender Returning to Incarceration Within 3 Years of Release," which shows a graphical summary of decreasing recidivism rates from 2015 to 2021. She said that there was not any state data available to group data from reentry efforts and recidivism rates. However, data from nationwide efforts regarding reentry efforts suggested positive outcomes. On the additional slides she discussed reentry efforts with the State of Alaska (SOA). She concluded the presentation by commenting that national recidivism rates are 23 percent lower than 2008 and commented that achieving these rates were due to changes in policy and increasing opportunities and resources to support employment, behavioral healthcare, and housing.

[3:54:43 PM](#)

BARBARA MONGAR, Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition, began her invited testimony in support of CSHB 35(CRA). Representing the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition, she noted that she has worked as the coordinator for the group for the past five and a half years. The coalition consists of state agencies such as the Alaska Department of Labor (DOL) and the Department of Corrections (DOC), community substance treatment centers such as Set Free Alaska, Inc. and True North Recovery, Inc.; Mat-Su Health Services, Inc.; tribal agencies; and nonprofit and private community service agencies. She said that the close community partnership through the coalition has made it easier to provide wrap-around services. A reentry case manager starts planning with individuals scheduled for release at least 30 days before their release. These services include comprehensive case planning, housing support, employment support, parole and probation support, and referrals for substance and mental health treatment. She remarked that the case managers also assist

individuals in obtaining clothing and hygiene items, applying for benefits such as Medicaid or food stamps, and accessing other services needed for post-incarceration success.

MS. MONGAR said that the coalition supports HB 35 because the bill would help remove barriers that restrict inmates from utilizing certain electronic devices such as computers or digital tablets for improved access to rehabilitation activities and programs. She stated that early access to these services would increase the likelihood that individuals will successfully integrate into the community once they are released from incarceration.

3:57:07 PM

BOBBY DORTON, Consultant, Healing Homes, began his invited testimony on CSHB 35(CRA) by talking about his experience while incarcerated. He noted that he was last incarcerated for over eight years; five years in a corrections facility and three years using an ankle monitor. He said that while incarcerated he wanted to learn how to read and did a lot of reading. Additionally, he engaged with some of the available programs for inmates such as the substance abuse program. He said that he "hungered" for a career once he was able to leave incarceration but felt that he did not have all the appropriate avenues available to study these different skills. He said that while there was a culinary program, it was limited in nature and not many people were selected, and it required being in the right institution. He did, however, mention that following his release a few more programs have been made available to inmates.

MR. DORTON emphasized what he "could have been" if he were able to satiate his "hunger" for learning given the time he had available. He felt "warehoused" and "stored away" in prison. He said that a lot of money was spent on him to be incarcerated; he believed around \$150 a day, and during this time he was ready to learn but everything was on hold. He said he had to wait to be released to begin training, school, and the ability to acquire a career that he wanted. He reiterated that while in prison, he could have been getting ready for a career but was instead "warehoused."

MR. DORTON said that for the last seven years he has worked on facilitating reentry for inmates. He said that once many inmates are released, they are lost and often end up doing jobs that involve labor or other lines of work that do not fit their

individual passions. This is largely due to the inability to train when incarcerated. He said that if training tablets were available in prison, then the "sky is the limit" and the educational opportunity for expanding career prospects was substantial. He opined that his educational level would have been much higher had these educational tools been available for him while incarcerated. He believed that expanding the educational tools for inmates would allow for reentry into careers and not just jobs. He said that many inmates' following incarceration are working in fast food venues or washing dishes. He said that many of these jobs do not last and there was risk of recidivism when placed in the wrong job category. He said that putting opportunities in place for inmates and trying to mold individuals in preparation for a career of choice would create a better Alaska. In conclusion, he said that the educational benefit to electronic tablets would be substantial in supporting reentry for incarcerated Alaskans.

[4:02:48 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY thanked the testifiers. She asked the bill sponsor and testifiers whether they knew what kind of security measures could be expected with electronic tablets as this was a point of concern for some people.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that Deputy Commissioner April Wilkerson could help address this question. She remarked that this type of device would be offline system to her understanding.

[4:04:05 PM](#)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Corrections, in response to Representative Story, commented that security details were a concern for DOC as well. She said that the current pilot program is occurring at Highland Mountain Correctional Center. She said that DOC is utilizing a vendor that operates multiple corrections related network systems to provide electronic tablets to individuals in various correctional settings. She said that there is a structured and closed network that only allows departmentally approved content to be displayed on electronic tablets. She commented that the network is so "tight" that prisoners would not be able to take these tablets into the cells without disconnection occurring. She remarked that DOC is building trust with the devices and has faith in the possibilities of utilizing the tablets with the

pilot program. She reiterated that the network was quite limited and restricted in use.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked whether Ms. Wilkerson could elaborate on the current pilot program and how the electronic tablets were being utilized.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON remarked that the electronic tablet program at Highland Mountain Correctional Center was available to all offenders following orientation. The orientation consists of a medical and mental health assessment, an orientation video, an acknowledgment, and meeting with an institutional probation officer. She said that inmates are issued a unique personal identification number (PIN) that allows them access to the tablet. She said that the tablets have the digital law library, offender handbook, and allow for professional visitation with attorneys. She remarked that currently, visitation with friends and family was not allowed but electronic mail ("e-mail") can be received via a service paid by the sender, about half the price of a stamp. She said the tablets allow for instant messaging; however, these were monitored and tracked by staff in the facility. She said that the facility was piloting communication between the correctional superintendent and the population. She said that there had been a maintenance issue and the water had to be shut off. Notifications were made to inmates via the tablet regarding where bottled water would be stored, how long the water was out of service and other details. She remarked that the tablets can facilitate communication.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON said that DOC was also piloting requests for information (RFI). The process is for the offender to get a piece of paper and write out and complete the form; the form goes in a box; a sergeant will collect that information and distribute it, whether to medical, to disciplinary, jobs, or wherever the request is going. She said that individuals on the back end of RFIs will write responses that return to the box. She said that this was a very manual process. She said that DOC is trying to streamline this process via the use of the electronic tablets.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON said that DOC is also converting the grievance process, which much like RFIs is a manually intensive process. She noted that manual processes for completing forms were still available for those who do not have or want a tablet for use.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON said that more recently DOC was looking at expanding the education that is available on the program. This includes career exploration and preparation, computer literacy, and other employment and work skills. She said that currently, educational materials are limited as they were just being deployed.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON said that there is another program running out of Goose Creek Correctional Center following partnership with the courts. She said that this involved using tablets to engage in court proceedings to avoid transportation of inmates to and from courts. She said that DOC was in the process of bringing this service to Highland Mountain Correctional Center as well. She clarified that both facilities are using different tablets on separate networks.

[4:11:09 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY said that she was hoping to hear more about technical coding skills that incarcerated inmates could get when they reenter society but based on testimony it appeared the DOC was not quite there yet. She said that there are various network security companies in the United States, and she asked whether there could be any elaboration to what systems DOC uses.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON responded that DOC was not at the point at which it could offer coding education to inmates via the electronic tablets but wanted to get there. She recognized the nationwide workforce challenges that everyone is facing and expanding programming opportunities for the population could help.

[4:13:13 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that the zero fiscal note concerned him. He said that he has researched these companies for why they provide electronic tablets at no cost. He compared the tablets to printers, where the front-end cost is cheap, but the back-end cost is where they make considerable money. He said all the Internet providers for these secure networks utilized by tablets make huge money off prisoners and the states. He asked whether there was a request for proposal (RFP) out for these types of electronic tablets. He understood that one of the providers charges 50 cents an email and four times as much if it has a video or picture attached. He reiterated that the costs can be huge with these types of devices. He asked whether there was an anticipated cost when moving forward to scale this type

of service. He said that it was important to know what these back-end costs may be before moving forward with providing the service. He understood that these networks needed to be secure and asked for elaboration on what companies DOC has spoken with and what the anticipated costs may be.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON responded that the zero fiscal note attached to the proposed bill is because the legislation only gives the SOA the authority to use electronic tablets. Pending any final version of legislation, DOC is planning to evaluate how these tablets can be rolled out in the most beneficial fashion for the department while maintaining costs. She said that she envisioned the future use of an RFP and hopefully reducing expenditures and becoming more efficient, some of the savings could get redirected towards the cost of tablets. She noted that the cost of tablets at Highland Mountain Correctional Center is \$60 per month per user and that it is based on current operations.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON said that most vendors such as JPay, Securus, and ViaPath can offer reduced costs or limited services based on the functions of the tablets. She said that DOC was waiting to see what the final form of the proposed legislation may be to get an RFP prepared to expand the current pilot program into other institutions. It would likely be a budget request in the future.

[4:17:14 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK asked for explanation of cost avoidance in other areas regarding the use of electronic tablets.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON responded that reduced paper printing was one example of a cost avoidance since forms could be filled out digitally. She said that tablets would also reduce the manual burden of RFP requests around the facility and their distribution amongst personnel, freeing up this time, which would allow resources to be focused on other areas. Additionally, another area of savings would be document delivery, unless a hard copy is requested. She also speculated that visitation opportunities on the tablets could reduce in person visitation and reduce strain on staffing required for in-person accommodation. Lastly, he reiterated that telehealth and programming could reduce the movement of inmates in and out of the facility, which would also be a form of cost avoidance.

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REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND thanked the previous testifiers for their comments. He said that he has learned recidivism is significant in Alaska and how much cost is associated with it. He offered support to any remediation that could help drive down costs associated with incarceration. He commented that he hoped that as this technology continues to develop it could be an opportunity to engage with Alaska companies and entrepreneurs for service coverage. He was aware of Alaska startups already providing hardened tablets, but not specifically for prisons. He said that this could be an opportunity for Alaska, allowing those business opportunities to stay in the state.

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND asked whether there was a current method to track individuals using tablets to assess whether there was any meaningful impact following reentry. He said it may cost a small amount of money, but the cost savings given reduced rates of recidivism would save substantially more. He said SOA spends roughly \$70-\$80 thousand to keep someone in the prison system and a fifty-dollar investment in a tablet would be a considerable return on the investment. He said that being able to see the savings in action would make these decisions straightforward, but it would require the collection of data. He reiterated his question into whether DOC was collecting reentry data for individuals who used tablets and if not, could DOC begin collecting this information.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT responded that the question of causation and correlation always play into this discussion. She noted that there was some research in the committee's bill packets about recidivism at a national level [copy included in committee file]. She said that research indicates that recidivism is reduced with increased educational opportunities. She said that while there were educational programs available right now, nobody could force inmates to participate. She commented that it was human nature to want to occupy time with something. She deferred Deputy Commissioner Wilkerson for further comment.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON said that DOC intends to track as much data as possible to ensure the success of the tablet program. She said that the tablet infrastructure was put in place the previous March and devices were not rolled out until the beginning of April, with limited tablet functionality consisting of the handbook, digital library, and attorney-client visits. She remarked that only last October had DOC been able to work with the vendor to get the RFI process established,

grievance process and communications started with the tablets. Furthermore, the educational components of the tablets are only beginning to be "turned on". Due to recent implementation of the tablets, only limited data was available regarding outcomes from tablet use. She said that DOC plans to have tracking capabilities to monitor and report on the success and utilization of the tablets. She noted that everything on the tablet was recorded except for professional visits with their attorney clients.

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REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT noted that the committee should not overlook opportunities for faith-based services and family visitation. She commented on the vast nature of Alaska and the distance that many inmates have from families. She noted that Sitka has no long-term correctional facility and at best an inmate might be housed in Juneau. She said that at a minimum, a tablet would provide an opportunity for family visits when in-person visitation was not possible.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT also referenced a study evaluated by her research team that explained the impact of education on reentry success. She clarified that it was a national study and not specific to Alaska but indicated that educational opportunities reduce post-release incarceration rates by 13 percent. It also indicated a savings of five dollars in correctional costs for every single dollar spent on correctional education. She emphasized that the tablets are directly tied into educational access.

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND said that based on previous comments it is understood that DOC can track the use of the tablets and will be expanding what the tablets can be used for. He reiterated that his question pertained to tracking reentry for individuals who used a tablet and those who did not and their respective outcomes following reentry. He was interested in whether recidivism data could be correlated to tablet access. He acknowledged that the statistical significance might be speculative but explained that he was looking at data that could correlate from national studies as well and provide Alaska-specific information. He remarked that this type of data would help infer whether tablets had an impact on reducing recidivism rates in the state. Being able to see a change in Alaska's recidivism rates and correlating it back to different services, products, or tools would be ideal.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON said that DOC can track recidivism rates. For individuals returning to custody, the department can review what programming those individuals previously received, whether they had participated, completed it, or successfully completed it. She said that with regards to tablets, DOC can evaluate whether those inmates were issued a tablet and what it was used for. She said that this was a component that could be added to reports generated by the Department.

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REPRESENTATIVE MOORE asked whether Deputy Commissioner Wilkerson could elaborate on what was included in the \$50 a month cost associated with the electronic tablets.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON responded that this covers costs associated with setting up the system, setting up users, software updates, security elements, and services that were being provided. She compared it to costs associated with setting up phones.

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE noted that based on the language of the bill, some of the features were already being piloted on the tablets, such as entertainment and online education. He noted that in other states, entertainment is charged to the inmate, and inmates pay for online education courses. She said that inmates in other states often pay for text messaging and emails as well.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON clarified that from DOC's standpoint and the way the proposed legislation reads, there is no ability to allow for entertainment under the current bill language. She said that email and visitations are prohibited from being charged back to inmates. Because of this, any such services would require negotiation with the vendor, the department would need to return to the legislature to seek funding for full implementation.

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE asked, if the bill carries forward, whether DOC would also charge for entertainment and online educational courses. Furthermore, she inquired whether there had been any conversations about whether the department would charge inmates \$50 to cover the monthly fee associated with the tablets. She said that this would need to be addressed in a fiscal note.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER WILKERSON reiterated that DOC understands that the proposed legislation would not allow the use of tablets

for the purpose of entertainment. Furthermore, she reiterated that email and electronic visitations could not be charged to inmates. Because of this, negotiations would be required with the vendor regarding costs and required funding for full implementation.

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CHAIR CARRICK announced that CSHB 35(CRA) was held over.

HB 16-CAMPAIGN FINANCE, CONTRIBUTION LIMITS

[4:32:17 PM](#)

CHAIR CARRICK announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 16, "An Act amending campaign contribution limits for state and local office; directing the Alaska Public Offices Commission to adjust campaign contribution limits for state and local office once each decade beginning in 2031; and relating to campaign contribution reporting requirements."

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REPRESENTATIVE CALVIN SCHRAGE, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 16. He said that this was an act to amend campaign contribution limits for state and local offices. Pertaining to the Alaska Public Offices Commission (APOC), the bill would adjust campaign contribution limits once every decade beginning in 2031 as well as contribution reporting requirements.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE explained that in 2024, a ballot petition was certified after a grassroots effort gathered nearly 30,000 signatures from Alaska voters and met the 7 percent threshold in 32 of Alaska's 40 House districts; this puts the ballot measure in front of voters in 2026 if the Alaska Legislature did not pass similar legislation. He explained that HB 16 matches the ballot initiative.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE remarked that Alaska has historically had some of the strongest and most effective campaign finance laws in the nation, which serve to promote better accountability and trust in elections and elected officials. He said that in the past, Alaskans have shown their support for fair and reasonable limits, including a 2006 initiative that passed with 73 percent support. He said that unfortunately, in 2021 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down Alaska's statutory campaign

contribution limits, opening state and local elections to the threat of unlimited political contributions, from anywhere in the country.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE stated that HB 16 reinstates fair, reasonable, and constitutional campaign contribution limits, adjusted to Alaska's consumer price index moving forward, ensuring that these limits remain constitutional. He remarked that HB 16 would move Alaska's campaign contribution limits to a per-election basis as opposed to a per-year basis and would increase individual statutory limit from \$500 per year to \$2,000 per election cycle. Furthermore, it would change group limits from \$1,000 per year to \$4,000 per election cycle. Lastly, it would direct APOC to adjust contribution limits related to inflation.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE stated that these changes follow guidance laid out by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and United States Supreme Court precedent while upholding the desire of Alaska voters for fair and reasonable contribution limits.

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AMANDA NDEMO, Staff, Representative Calvin Schrage, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Schrage, prime sponsor, gave a PowerPoint presentation of HB 16 [hard copy included in the committee file]. She began by providing an overview of the history of political contributions in Alaska, highlighting key legislative actions, legal challenges, and reforms from 1974 to today. She remarked that Alaska has a long history of regulating political contributions, balancing the need to prevent corruption with the constitutional right to free speech. However, recent court decisions have significantly altered the campaign finance landscape. She explained that starting in 1974, Alaska adopted its first significant campaign finance regulations in response to national concerns over political corruption. Alaska's statutory individual contribution limits began at \$1,000. Adjusted for inflation, this amount would be \$5,303 today. This limit was in effect until 1995. These limits were changed in 1996 to \$500 following a citizens' initiative after the legislature's reaction to a citizens' initiative aimed at reducing these limits. Adjusted for inflation, this amount would be \$933 today. In 2003, the legislature passed Senate Bill 119, which raised the individual contribution limit back to \$1,000, approximately \$1,638 today. In response to concerns about political corruption, Alaska voters reaffirmed a \$500 limit in 2006 through Ballot Measure 1.

This measure passed overwhelmingly with 74 percent support. This limit remained in effect for over a decade but was never adjusted for inflation, making it one of the strictest in the country. This limit was later overturned in 2021 with the decision in *Thompson v. Hebdon*.

MS. NDEMO said that this case was initially brought forward in 2015 in federal district court. David Thompson and others filed a lawsuit challenging the \$500 individual contribution limit as a violation of the First Amendment. The lower court upheld the contribution limits, ruling that they were narrowly tailored to prevent corruption. The plaintiffs appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court in 2018. The Ninth Circuit Court upheld the district court's ruling, maintaining that Alaska's strict limits were sufficiently justified and closely drawn to a state interest, with preventing corruption as sufficient justification. The case was then petitioned and heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. The Ninth Circuit's decision was vacated for reconsideration, with the U.S. Supreme Court citing *Randall v. Sorrell*, a 2006 decision on Vermont's \$400 contribution limit that was determined to be unconstitutional.

MS. NDEMO explained that the importance of this case is the five-factor test, which provides guidance on whether states' contribution limits violate the First Amendment rights of individuals and political organizations. More specifically, the five-factor test asks: whether the limits are so low that they risk disadvantaging challengers compared to incumbents; whether the limits are unduly restrictive on the ability of political parties to support their candidates; whether volunteer services or expenses are considered contributions that would count toward the limit; whether the limits are adjusted for inflation; and whether there is a special justification warranting a contribution limit so low or so restrictive that it is based on a valid government interest. Of these five factors, Alaska failed to meet this threshold because contribution limits were too low and had not been adjusted for inflation since being initially implemented.

MS. NDEMO said that in 2021, APOC issued an advisory opinion following the court's decision. They set an annual limit of \$1,500 for contributions from an individual to a candidate and a \$3,000 limit for a group-to-candidate contribution. These numbers were based on the limits that were established by the Alaska legislature in 2003, which was a \$1,000 contribution limit for an individual to a candidate but increased for inflation. She said APOC's five commissioners voted on whether

to accept the staff's advisory opinion. Three out of five voted in support; however, the staff advisory opinion was not accepted because they failed to get the required four votes. Alaska currently has no individual-to-candidate limits, out-of-state contribution limits, or individual-to-group limits. This has left Alaska and local elections open to unlimited and outside funding.

MS. NDEMO explained HB 16 aims to offer a balanced approach to the reinstatement of campaign contribution limits in Alaska. Furthermore, HB 16 seeks to modify the existing limits on campaign contributions for state and local offices by establishing the contribution limits. It also establishes contribution limits based on an election cycle, ensuring consistent limits regardless of election timing or candidate entry date. Additionally, it directs APOC to adjust these limits every decade starting in 2031 to account for inflation. Shown in the slide is a summary of the proposed contribution limits. Individual contribution limits were previously set to \$500; adjusted for inflation, this is \$751 today. The new limits would be \$2,000. An individual's contribution limit to a political party and a non-political party's contribution to a group, non-group entity, or political party would be set at \$5,000. This has not changed and was not an issue with the court. A non-political party to an individual is set at \$4,000. A non-group entity to a non-group entity was set at \$1,000 in 2006, which is \$1,501 today. The new limit would be \$4,000. A group to join a joint campaign for governor and lieutenant governor is \$2,000, which is \$3,003 today. The new limit would be \$8,000. This is just a simple infographic of those changes. This slide provides a visual of the five-factor test from *Randall v. Sorrell* and how HB 16 implements those specific questions that were asked by the court. Overall, this initiative brings Alaska's individual-to-candidate and individual-to-group political contribution limits in compliance with the *Thompson v. Hebdon* court decision. It re-establishes limits that Alaska voters' support.

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CHAIR CARRICK said that review of the sectional analysis wasn't necessary and asked committee if they had questions.

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REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND asked whether these limits apply to all races including the local assembly, school board, and both state

and federal elections. He was unsure whether the bill covered all elections that are managed by the state.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE responded that federal elections are governed through federal law and the proposed legislation was focused on state elections including the governor's race, the House, Senate, and municipal races.

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND asked for clarification whether the proposed bill would comply with the citizens' initiative.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE responded that the proposed bill mirrors exactly what is certified to appear on the 2026 ballot.

CHAIR CARRICK said the committee would hear invited testimony.

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SHARMAN HALEY began her invited testimony by giving her background as a now retired policy analyst and researcher, including time spent with Legislative Legal and Research Services and the Institute of Social and Economic Research. She stated that she has been working on this issue for about 10 years. She said that currently she was involved in work with Alaska Move to Amend, Citizens Against Money in Politics, American Promise, as well as with ordinary citizens and politicians who care about this issue.

MS. HALEY said that the proposed bill should not be controversial and that it had solid support amongst Alaska constituents across the political spectrum. She explained that the bill contained the same language as the citizens' initiative that would be on the 2026 ballot, but there is hope that the legislature would pass the legislation this session and save the effort necessary to put forth a ballot measure. She remarked that the bill was carefully crafted to conform to the five criteria dictated by the Ninth Circuit Court that struck down previous law; any "gray areas" that might be grounds for legal challenge have been removed from the bill. She noted that it is a politically solid bill because Alaskans have demonstrated their support for strong campaign finance laws.

MS. HALEY explained that the old campaign finance also began as a citizen initiative and was enacted by the legislature in 1996. It was one of the strictest in the country, with contribution limits of \$500. She said that the legislature felt that this was inadequate because some candidates were required to do a lot

of fundraising. She said that in 2003 limits were increased to \$1,000, but voters stepped up in 2006 and passed another initiative bringing campaign limits back to \$500. This 2006 initiative passed with a 73 percent approval rating. She said that the initiative passed with a solid majority in every single district of the state.

MS. HALEY explained that Alaskans want strong campaign finance limits to protect the balance of power and limit the disproportionate influence and corrupting power of big money in elections. She said that in 2020, there was a poll that illustrated that 71 percent of Alaskans would support a U.S. constitutional amendment restoring full authority to set reasonable limits on political spending in elections, including independent expenditures. The court in Citizens United said that it could not be limited. As a result of that poll, support for a constitutional amendment restoring authority to limit independent expenditures was strong across both political parties and independents.

MS. HALEY said she probably did not need to restate the limits in the bill because the committee already had that. She said she would have chosen a lower limit than \$2,000 and that she had run the numbers a couple of years earlier, but there had been a lot of inflation since then, and she accepted the political judgment of the sponsors that \$2,000 was a safer number politically. She stated that the two big improvements in the bill over the old law were that the limit would be per election cycle and not per year - because savvy people used to double dip in December and January - and that it would automatically adjust the limits for inflation every 10 years, which was one of the requirements from the Ninth Circuit Court. She concluded by saying that she and her fellow Alaskans supported HB 16 and called on the committee to support it as well.

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REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that he was interested in definitions and whether there was a difference between a group and a non-group.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE responded that he would have to follow up with an answer.

MS. NDEMO responded that definitions for this could be found in Alaska Statute (AS) 15.13.400.

[4:53:59 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE asked Representative Schrage why he did not take this opportunity to make APOC more accountable and it seemed like the commission needed more transparent direction through statute. She said that most legislators she knew would like this to come from the commission and asked whether this additional step would make the proposed bill more convoluted.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE asked for additional clarification regarding the question.

REPRESENTATIVE MOORE clarified that the question is whether there was a reason not to take the opportunity to overhaul APOC protocols when drafting the legislation.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE provided clarification of the history of why the bill was proposed. He said that efforts began after the court struck down previous limits and the initial approach was to fix the hole created in Alaska's campaign finance structure following the court ruling. He said that the intent was to take the "lightest touch, most straightforward approach" to restoring campaign contribution limits, which is what the proposed bill would accomplish. He said that he was happy to discuss the mechanics associated with this process.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that while he has not been involved in politics for a substantial amount of time, he frequently hears various concerns about APOC. These concerns regard funding and staffing limitations to why they cannot proactively enforce campaign finance laws. He said that the funding aspect is a policy decision for the state. He reiterated that his approach was just to address the lack of limits and enforceability of the mechanics that APOC currently has. He said that in his experience talking with legislators and those involved in campaigns, there is not a consistent view of how APOC should be structured. He said that there was concern with some people giving APOC enforcement mechanisms due to its potential weaponization as an agency.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE commented that people are comfortable with what they know today, which is a complaint-based system, where if someone notices something odd, they file a complaint; this is what triggers enforcement and investigation. He said that the legislature could consider whether they wanted APOC to have enforcement capability, but it was something that he was reluctant to do because the primary goal is to take care of the

shortcomings in campaign finance. He suggested APOC reform is something that could be done in the future.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked whether Representative Schrage knew what the proportional support was for campaign contribution regarding the citizens' initiative.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE responded that with the ballot initiative it is not possible to ascertain what percentage of people support the initiative since the objective is to simply collect the minimum number of signatures, both as an aggregate and a minimum across several districts in the state. He said that while the signatures required to initiate a ballot measure were met, it does not necessarily speak to the level of support that exists in Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that given recent polling in the past couple weeks, it is deduced that support is upwards of 65 percent. He said looking at other polls and some of the ballot initiatives that his staff walked through, support has remained well over 60 if not even above 75 percent support. He said there was a "strong appetite" for this change to occur in Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that with regard to limits, he wanted to provide a background to campaign contribution limits. He said that as the presentation indicated, the individual campaign limits have gone from \$500 to \$2,000, and while this seems like a considerable jump, it pertains to each election cycle as opposed to an annual limit. He said that in the old system, one could collect \$500 twice for a total of \$1,000 per individual contribution, now it would be \$2,000 - double the limit. He said that the old limits did not account for inflation, and with this consideration, the limit would be about \$1,500 per election cycle. He said that \$2,000 was selected because previous limits were struck down in part for being too low; the \$2,000 limit is intended to reduce the limits being tossed out by courts again.

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REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that APOC needs a "haircut." He said that if he had it his way, he would get rid of APOC entirely and adopt the Federal Exchange Commission (FEC) limits. He recognized that once "Pandora's box" gets opened, things get

complicated fast. He highlighted the enormous problem Alaska has with outside money. He understood Citizens United but said the reality is that Alaska "is a cheap date." He said that the state has roughly 530,000 voters and, for only a few million dollars, outside interests can reach voters multiple times. He said this money overwhelmingly targets ballot measures, such as this ballot measure.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that it is frustrating that Alaska is constrained by the courts. The citizens said \$500, then the legislature said \$1,000, then the citizens reinstated the said \$500, then the court said no to everything. He said that it may be wise to start listening to the citizens. He said that Alaska voters he spoke with were extremely upset about "dark money" coming into Alaska to experiment with state affairs such as the election system. He said whether someone supported ranked choice voting or not, Alaska is the "guinea pig."

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE responded that he shares the same frustration. He said that as an Alaskan who strongly believes in campaign contribution limits, he was deeply frustrated by the Citizens United ruling. He opined that it was a mistake or at the very least, a problematic decision that limits Alaska's right to self-determination. As previously noted, the decision places strict limits on what states are allowed to do. He said that Citizens United established several principles, but one of the most consequential is that contribution limits can only be justified for a very narrow set of reasons. Today, the only legally valid justification is preventing the actuality or appearance of corruption. He said that previously states could rely on other rationale such as self-determination, but these arguments were no longer available. He said that since corruption is now the sole permissible justification, out-of-state donations cannot be banned. He said that as a policymaker he could not claim that an out-of-state contribution poses any greater risk of corrupting an elected official than an in-state donor. As a result, Citizens United effectively prohibits states from limiting out-of-state donations to local elections.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that he has worked with legislators to explore creative new approaches to this problem, but so far, he has not believed that a solution has been identified that would survive legal scrutiny. He shared Representative McCabe's concerns regarding outside money. He said that he was interested in pursuing a resolution urging Congress to address this issue directly; this is the only path to restoring meaningful limits on out-of-state donors.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that while out-of-state spending is a serious problem, there were at least a few mitigating factors worth consideration. He noted that when one outside group pours money into Alaska, an opposing group is able, though not always, to rally resources and provide a counterweight in the same media market. An independent expenditure group faces a disadvantage that candidates do not: dramatically higher advertising rates. He said that it may cost \$100 for campaign to run a mailer or advertisement ("ad"), whereas independent expenditure groups might pay \$700 to \$1,000 for the same placement. He said that it does not solve the problem but blunts some of the impact of outside spending.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that he was trying to understand how outside money would function under this HB 16. As he read it, outside contributions would be limited for candidates, which would mean that someone from outside the state could not contribute directly to a candidates' campaign, even though independent expenditures would still be allowed. He asked whether ballot measures could be treated the same as candidates and said that campaign contribution limits apply to state and local offices. It would not stop independent expenditure groups from advertising, but it would prevent contributing directly to the ballot measure committees themselves. He said that he was unsure how this would play out legally, but looking at the same problem, it feels unconscionable that certain groups can pour \$20 million from outside the state trying to oppose people that might have \$100,000 or less. He said the imbalance is staggering.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that he is happy to explore this issue but would want to ensure that solutions would pass legal scrutiny.

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REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that like Representative McCabe, she was appalled by the amount of outside money flowing into Alaska. She asked Representative Schrage, if the bill passed, whether these rules would be enforced for the 2026 election cycle. She said that she agreed with the inflation-proofing associated with the proposed bill.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE responded that if the bill were passed and signed into law, then it would be in effect for the next campaign cycle. He said that this was something that would need

to be monitored as the bill progresses. He noted that if the bill did not pass until the upcoming legislature [2026], then the effective dates may require adjustment.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that the \$2,000 individual contribution per cycle seems high, but in her district, five of the communities are only reachable by vehicle after she gets there, which requires a \$700 round-trip ticket from her home. She said that she has a lot of low-income areas that can't contribute, even if they wanted to. She said that despite the contribution limit seeming high, only a few members of her district could realistically contribute that much.

REPRESENTATIVE SCHRAGE said that it had been hard work to come up with a contribution limit that is legally defensible but reasonably low. He reiterated that the goal is to match the intent of Alaskans who have made it clear that they want a low contribution limit. He said that Alaskans are sensitive to issues surrounding corruption and distrust of election officials. He raised concern about contributions' abilities to influence a legislator's role and the issue of "indebtedness."

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REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND asked whether the committee still planned on public testimony for the proposed bill on the upcoming Saturday since he had interested testifiers.

CHAIR CARRICK affirmed that the proposed bill would be brought back for the upcoming Saturday committee meeting.

[HB 16 was held over.]

[5:12:15 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House State Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 5:12 p.m.