

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
February 27, 2025  
9:04 a.m.

9:04:04 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Stedman called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair  
Senator James Kaufman  
Senator Jesse Kiehl  
Senator Kelly Merrick  
Senator Mike Cronk

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Lyman Hoffman, Co-Chair  
Senator Donny Olson, Co-Chair

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Tracey Schaeffer, Self, Kotzebue; Eileen Arnold, Director, Tundra Women's Coalition, Bethel; Rex Nick, City of Pilot Station, Pilot Station; Nikki Pollock, Self, Bethel; Rowena Palomar, Director, Advocates for Victims of Domestic Violence, Valdez; Ellen Jaimes, Self, Anchorage; Craig Fredeen, Self, Anchorage; Julie Truskowski, Retired Teacher, Anchorage; Caroline Storm, Executive Director, Coalition for Education Equity, Anchorage; Nils Anderson, Self, Anchorage; Janine Allen, Advocate, Southeast Alaska Independent Living, Haines; Laura Steele, Self, Juneau; Francis McLaughlin, Self, Anchorage; Denice Gilroy, Executive Director, Arctic Access and Independent Living Network, Nome; Bill Elmore, Self, Kenai; Ed Martin, Self, Kenai; Terri Walker, Superintendent, Northwest Arctic Borough School District, Kotzebue; Olivia Yancy, Special Education Service Agency, Anchorage.

SUMMARY

SB 56      APPROP: OPERATING BUDGET; CAP; SUPP

SB 56 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 57        APPROP: CAPITAL/SUPPLEMENTAL/FUNDS

SB 57 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 58        APPROP: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET

SB 58 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 59        APPROP: SUPPLEMENTAL; FUND CAP

SB 59 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

#sb56

#sb57

#sb58

#sb59

SENATE BILL NO. 56

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and loan program expenses of state government and for certain programs; capitalizing funds; amending appropriations; making supplemental appropriations; making reappropriations; making appropriations under art. IX, sec. 17(c), Constitution of the State of Alaska, from the constitutional budget reserve fund; and providing for an effective date."

SENATE BILL NO. 57

"An Act making appropriations, including capital appropriations and other appropriations; making reappropriations; making appropriations to capitalize funds; and providing for an effective date."

SENATE BILL NO. 58

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and capital expenses of the state's integrated comprehensive mental health program; and providing for an effective date."

SENATE BILL NO. 59

"An Act making supplemental appropriations; making appropriations to capitalize funds; and providing for an effective date."

^PUBLIC TESTIMONY: NOME, KOTZEBUE, UTQIAGVIK, BETHEL, UNALASKA, DILLINGHAM, OFFNETS

[9:04:58 AM](#)

TRACEY SCHAEFFER, SELF, KOTZEBUE (via teleconference), spoke in support of an increase to the Base Student Allocation (BSA). She also testified in support of Early Learning Programs. She also spoke in support of childcare, and felt that the work force in the state would be enhanced if there was quality childcare in the state.

[9:07:11 AM](#)

EILEEN ARNOLD, DIRECTOR, TUNDRA WOMEN'S COALITION, BETHEL (via teleconference), spoke in support of programs related to protecting children. She stressed that the Tundra Women's Coalition is focused on protecting children, and she shared their accreditations.

[9:10:11 AM](#)

REX NICK, CITY OF PILOT STATION, PILOT STATION (via teleconference), testified in support of full funding for \$82,000 for Pilot Station. He stressed that the employees were experiencing financial stress, and also there was a lack of fuel and the water pipes were frozen.

[9:12:03 AM](#)

NIKKI POLLOCK, SELF, BETHEL (via teleconference), spoke in curiosity of more details related to Mr. Nick's testimony. She remarked that there was a budget deficit, but a very large portion for the Department of Corrections (DOC). She stressed that the funding did not include the Division of Juvenile Justice. She testified in support of fully funding the Division of Juvenile Justice. She also spoke in support of funding for meals for seniors in Bethel and across the state. She felt that funding for the meals would reduce the cost of Medicaid and Medicare.

[9:15:39 AM](#)

ROWENA PALOMAR, DIRECTOR, ADVOCATES FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, VALDEZ (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for programs related to support for victims of domestic violence.

[9:18:21 AM](#)

AT EASE

RECONVENED

Co-Chair Stedman handed the gavel to Senator Kaufman.

[9:19:50 AM](#)

ELLEN JAIMES, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of an increase to the BSA. She stressed the importance of funding for education.

[9:21:02 AM](#)

CRAIG FREDEEN, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the BSA. He remarked that the BSA would lower the long-term cost of school, because it was related to maintenance.

[9:23:55 AM](#)

JULIE TRUSKOWSKI, RETIRED TEACHER, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for education. She testified in support of an increase to the BSA. She remarked that she was an advisor in student sports. She remarked that the Anchorage School District had announced that they would cut funding for sports activities in middle school.

[9:25:21 AM](#)

CAROLINE STORM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COALITION FOR EDUCATION EQUITY, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for an increase to the BSA. She read Article 7, Section 1; and Article 8, Section 2 of the Alaska Constitution. She stressed support for an increase to education funding. She remarked that there were

significant revenues for oil companies, so the legislature had the power to increase revenue to the state to fund education services.

[9:27:01 AM](#)

NILS ANDERSON, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for behavioral health services. He shared many stories about the importance of behavioral health services funding.

[9:30:13 AM](#)

JANINE ALLEN, ADVOCATE, SOUTHEAST ALASKA INDEPENDENT LIVING, HAINES (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for Southeast Alaska Independent Living (SAIL). She specifically spoke in support of funding for home modifications for those recipients of SAIL.

[9:32:08 AM](#)

LAURA STEELE, SELF, JUNEAU (via teleconference), spoke in support of full funding and an increase to the BSA. She stressed that she wanted to stay in Alaska, but would need to leave without a quality education for her children.

[9:33:15 AM](#)

FRANCIS MCLAUGHLIN, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of an increase to the BSA. He stated that the cuts to teachers and sports had a detrimental effect on his family. He remarked that teacher layoffs resulted in one-third of those teachers not returning. He stated that his children spoke Mandarin fluently, due to the immersion program that they were enrolled in. He remarked that being fluent in another language would be beneficial to national security.

[9:36:33 AM](#)

DENICE GILROY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARCTIC ACCESS AND INDEPENDENT LIVING NETWORK, NOME (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for home modification and upgrades. She remarked that the current proposed budget was half of the recommended amount needed for home modifications. She remarked that Arctic Access for

Independent Living was vital for supporting seniors in northern Alaska.

[9:38:55 AM](#)

BILL ELMORE, SELF, KENAI (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for education. He remarked that he had served as a mayor in a community in the state. He felt that there could be an education endowment to pay for education in the state.

[9:40:14 AM](#)

AT EASE

[9:40:41 AM](#)

RECONVENED

Senator Kaufman stated that the committee would take a recess until 10am.

[9:40:56 AM](#)

RECESSED

[10:00:35 AM](#)

RECONVENED

[10:01:09 AM](#)

ED MARTIN, SELF, KENAI (via teleconference), spoke in opposition to excessive spending. He recalled that he had written to the committee regarding the Alaska Permanent Fund. He specified that he wanted an examination of who was investing in the state. He requested that someone on the committee respond to his letter to the committee.

Senator Kaufman stated that the committee would recess until 10:20am.

[10:04:45 AM](#)

RECESSED

[10:20:28 AM](#)

RECONVENED

[10:20:51 AM](#)

TERRI WALKER, SUPERINTENDENT, NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT, KOTZEBUE (via teleconference), spoke in support of increased funding for the BSA. She remarked that an increase in funding for education would enhance the education for students in many villages in and around Kotzebue. She stated that there was a current athletic tournament in her community that was enhancing the spirit and enthusiasm for schools and student learning.

[10:23:33 AM](#)

OLIVIA YANCY, SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for education, and specifically funding related to special education services. She testified in support of an increase to the BSA. She explained some of the issues and cases related to students within the special education programs. She encouraged an increase to the current funding formula for education.

[10:25:22 AM](#)

Senator Kaufman stated that the next meeting would be that afternoon at 1pm, which would be a continuation of public testimony.

SB 56 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

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ADJOURNMENT

[10:26:01 AM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 10:26 a.m.