

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
February 27, 2026
1:31 p.m.

1:31:18 PM

CALL TO ORDER

Senator Kiehl called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 1:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Donny Olson, Co-Chair
Senator Mike Cronk
Senator James Kaufman (via teleconference)
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Kelly Merrick

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Lyman Hoffman, Co-Chair
Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair

ALSO PRESENT

Trevor Storrs, President and CEO, Alaska Childrens Trust, Juneau; Tamar Ben-Yosef, Executive Director, All Alaska Pediatric Partnership, Juneau;

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Amy Simpson, Executive Director, Program for Infants and Children, Anchorage; Rozlyn Grady-Wyche, Alaska Education Chair, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Alaska Oregon Washington State Area Conference, Anchorage; Kelly Lessens, Member, Anchorage School Board, Anchorage; Amanda Thompson, Self, Anchorage; Kelly Bender, Self, Eagle River; Theresa Obermeyer, Self, Anchorage; Heather Fernstrom, Self, Soldotna; Carolyn Storm, Executive Director, Coalition for Education Equity, Anchorage; George Pierce, Self, Board of Game, Kasilof; Rachel Posey, Self, Anchorage; Keeley Olson, Executive Director, Standing Together Against Rape (STAR), Anchorage; Stephanie Berglund, CEO, Thread, Anchorage; Mildred Parker,

Self, Anchorage; Kristen Green, Self, Anchorage; Erica Monahan, Self, Anchorage;

SUMMARY

SB 213 APPROP: OPERATING BUDGET;AMEND;SUPP

SB 213 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 214 APPROP: CAPITAL/FUNDS/SUPP/REAPPROP

SB 214 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

SB 215 APPROP: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET

SB 215 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

CSHB 289(FIN)(brf sup maj fld)
 APPROP: SUPPLEMENTAL

CSHB 289(FIN)(brf sup maj fld) was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY: ANCHORAGE, MATANUSKA-SUSITNA VALLEY,
KENAI PENINSULA

#sb213

#sb214

#sb215

#hb289

SENATE BILL NO. 213

"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 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. 214

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

SENATE BILL NO. 215

"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."

CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 289(FIN) (brf sup maj fld)

"An Act making appropriations, including supplemental appropriations, capital appropriations, reappropriations, and other appropriations; amending appropriations; capitalizing funds; and providing for an effective date."

[1:33:23 PM](#)

^PUBLIC TESTIMONY: ANCHORAGE, MATANUSKA-SUSITNA VALLEY, KENAI PENINSULA

[1:33:20 PM](#)

AMY SIMPSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PROGRAM FOR INFANTS AND CHILDREN, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of the infant learning program. She stressed that helping children with early learning with \$5.7 million in the budget saves money later, and sets children on a good path in school and life. She remarked that there had not been a funding increase since 2013, but the cost of business had increased significantly in that time. She remarked that investing now could save an estimated \$35 million later in life.

[1:35:27 PM](#)

ROZLYN GRADY-WYCHE, ALASKA EDUCATION CHAIR, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE (NAACP), ALASKA OREGON WASHINGTON STATE AREA CONFERENCE, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), urged an increase investment in schools. She stressed that the current budget level and formula was not sustainable. She remarked that inflation had effected schools in recent years. She noted that

investing more in Department of Corrections (DOC) shows the values of the legislature. She testified in support of implementing a long-term funding plan for the schools in Alaska. She wanted the children in the state to feel that they are a priority.

[1:37:51 PM](#)

KELLY LESSENS, MEMBER, ANCHORAGE SCHOOL BOARD, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), shared that she had recently voted to reduce the personnel in her district, because of significant budget deficits. She remarked that it was especially difficult to implement the class size requirements that were enacted by the legislature in the year prior. She stressed that students need accurate data-informed funding for their schools. She urged the committee to amend the bill to fully fund education.

[1:39:37 PM](#)

AMANDA THOMPSON, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of education funding. She shared that it was important for the public schools to direct the funding for their own unique needs. She stressed that it was important for the funding to have accountability attached to it. She remarked on the importance of arts education funding in the schools. She remarked that she was also concerned as a parent, and spoke to the stresses that she and her child face in the schools.

[1:41:50 PM](#)

KELLY BENDER, SELF, EAGLE RIVER (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for the tourism marketing budget. She stated that the \$10 million was necessary for her small business to succeed. She remarked on the basic impacts of tourism on her business. She stated that her company grew to a year-round business. She felt that the investment in tourism marketing enhanced her business and the wellbeing of her community and the state as a whole. She shared a story about sisters who had moved to the state after working for a season in tourism. She felt that the state should have the courage to invest in the state, just like the courage of the young people that choose to move here to live and raise their families.

[1:44:32 PM](#)

TREVOR STORRS, PRESIDENT AND CEO, ALASKA CHILDRENS TRUST, JUNEAU, spoke in support of funding for the Infant Learning Program. He urged an increase of funding by \$5.72 million. He remarked that it would reduce cost and encourage long-term budget sustainability. He remarked that special education would save the state in the future. He stated that the number of children in Alaska experiencing disability had increased in recent years. He stressed that the Infant Learning Program supports the most significant time of a child's life when there is most growth and development of a brain.

[1:47:10 PM](#)

THERESA OBERMEYER, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), felt that the public testimony should be set up where the committee can see her testify. She stated that she represented a family of 14 people. She stated that she was an educator and that her husband worked for the legislature. She remarked that another testifier had remarked on the salary of an individual. She recalled some issues about money and testimony in other committees. She thanked the committee.

[1:50:15 PM](#)

HEATHER FERNSTROM, SELF, SOLDOTNA (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for education. She felt that the issues about the ways to invest in schools happened year after year. She remarked on her local school that had experienced another deficit. She stressed the importance of finding a long-term fiscal solution for funding the schools at a rate that accounts at least for inflation. She felt that it should be the number one priority in the budget.

[1:51:45 PM](#)

CAROLYN STORM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COALITION FOR EDUCATION EQUITY, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of education funding. She asked for a minimum of an additional \$175 million to the current budget. She felt that it would keep up with inflation and increase the Base Student Allocation (BSA). She remarked on the closure of schools and the increase in budget deficits in school districts in the state. She felt that accountability and

confidence was necessary when implementing the budget. She shared some of the high salaries of some employees.

Senator Kiehl stated that the committee would recess until 2:15pm

1:54:26 PM
AT EASE

2:15:10 PM
RECONVENED

2:16:24 PM

GEORGE PIERCE, SELF, BOARD OF GAME, KASILOF (via teleconference), spoke about oil taxes and increasing oil taxes to 30 percent which would help to fund government. He remarked felt that there was erosion in oil tax revenue for the state. He stated that the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) was intended for Alaskans current needs. He demanded an increase in taxes on the oil companies.

2:18:30 PM

RACHEL POSEY, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for public education. She stressed that schools were the foundation of strong and vibrant communities. She felt that the lack of school funding resulted in families moving out of state. She stressed that every dollar invested in classrooms were dollars well spent. She stressed that corporate tax rates did not build communities. She thanked the committee for the recent BSA increase, but felt that it was not enough.

2:20:19 PM

KEELEY OLSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, STANDING TOGETHER AGAINST RAPE (STAR), ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for the line item for the Department of Public Safety (DPS) for domestic violence and sexual assault programs and legal services statewide. She recalled that she had spoken with legislators about the need for the increased funding due to inflation and cost of living increases. She shared that she could not afford to pay her staff a living wage. She remarked that crisis intervention and assisting survivors and their families were public safety investments.

[2:23:17 PM](#)

TAMAR BEN-YOSEF, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALL ALASKA PEDIATRIC PARTNERSHIP, JUNEAU, testified in support of \$500,000 for the crisis call center line item. She stressed that the call centers served families and children. She spoke in support of \$750,000 for small in-home group settings. She pointed out the state was not fulfilling its obligation. She spoke in support of \$5.72 million to respond to inflation and eligibility to provide comprehensive and early intervention services.

Senator Kiehl stated that the committee would recess until 2:40pm.

[2:26:00 PM](#)

AT EASE

[2:40:28 PM](#)

RECONVENED

[2:41:41 PM](#)

STEPHANIE BERGLUND, CEO, THREAD, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for early childhood education. She testified specifically in support of funding for childcare. She stated that there was a need for access and workforce. She remarked that there were over 23,000 children that needed access to childcare. She stated that an investment of \$15 million would work toward maintaining childcare. She remarked that investing in children early set them up for success later in life.

[2:43:54 PM](#)

MILDRED PARKER, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of childcare, which included ongoing funding to maintain personnel. She remarked that early educators were leaving because work was not sustainable and pay was too low. She remarked that the funding would prevent closures and stabilize classrooms for children. She felt that strong childcare resulted in a strong economy.

[2:45:41 PM](#)

KRISTEN GREEN, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), spoke in support of funding for education, and expressed concern about the school closures and increased class sizes.

[2:46:27 PM](#)

ERICA MONAHAN, SELF, ANCHORAGE (via teleconference), testified in support of funding for public education. She felt that strong public education was necessary for a strong community. She remarked that there needed to be good teachers and reasonable class sizes. She also spoke to the importance of extracurricular activities. She stressed the importance of education funding in the state.

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#

ADJOURNMENT

[2:48:14 PM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 2:48 p.m.