

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 11, 2025

3:29 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Scott Kawasaki, Chair  
Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Vice Chair  
Senator Bill Wielechowski  
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Robert Yundt

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 64

"An Act relating to elections; relating to voters; relating to voting; relating to voter preregistration for minors at least 16 years of age; relating to voter registration; relating to the Alaska Public Offices Commission; relating to synthetic media in electioneering communications; relating to campaign signs; relating to public official financial disclosures; relating to the crime of unlawful interference with voting in the first degree; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 62

"An Act relating to the board of parole; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 71

"An Act relating to pretrial services supervision agreements."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 19

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

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 62

SHORT TITLE: BOARD OF PAROLE: MEMBERSHIP, REPORT

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) TOBIN

01/24/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/24/25 (S) STA, L&C  
02/19/25 (S) SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED-REFERRALS  
02/19/25 (S) STA, L&C  
03/11/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 71

SHORT TITLE: PRETRIAL SERVICES SUPERVISION AGRMNTS

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/24/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/24/25 (S) STA, JUD  
03/11/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 19

SHORT TITLE: PRISONERS: ELECTRONIC DEVICE ACCESS/USE

SPONSOR(s): MYERS

01/10/25 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25  
01/22/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/22/25 (S) STA, JUD  
03/11/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 64

SHORT TITLE: ELECTIONS

SPONSOR(s): RULES

01/24/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/24/25 (S) STA, FIN  
01/30/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)  
01/30/25 (S) Heard & Held  
01/30/25 (S) MINUTE(STA)  
02/04/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)  
02/04/25 (S) -- Invited & Public Testimony --  
03/11/25 (S) STA AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

**WITNESS REGISTER**

DAVID DUNSMORE, Staff  
Senator Bill Wielechowski

Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented the summary of changes for SB 64.

LANI GERKEN, representing self  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 64

DAVID ZIMMER, representing self  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified with concerns on SB 64.

EMILY LEAK-MICHIE, Executive Director  
The Alaska Voter Hub  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 64.

FRANCISCO (CISCO) MERCADO, Policy Director  
Alaska Community Action on Toxics  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 64.

SENATOR LOKI TOBIN, District I  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Sponsor of SB 62.

LOUIE FLORA, Staff  
Senator Loki Tobin  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the sectional analysis for SB 62.

KAREN CANN, representing self  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified by invitation on SB 62.

MEGAN EDGE, Prison Project Director  
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 62.

JEN WINKELMAN, Commissioner  
Department of Corrections (DOC)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced SB 71.

APRIL WILKERSON, Deputy Commissioner  
Department of Corrections (DOC)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the sectional analysis for SB 71.

SENATOR ROBERT MYERS, District Q  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Sponsor of SB 19.

ASHLEYN BROOKS, Intern  
Senator Robert Myers  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the sectional analysis for SB 19.

TERI TIBBETT, Coordinator  
Alaska Reentry Partnership (ARP)  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified by invitation on SB 19.

DON HABEGGER, Coordinator  
Juneau Reentry Coalition  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified by invitation on SB 19.

MARSHA OSS, Coordinator  
Fairbanks Reentry Partnership  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified by invitation on SB 19.

BARBARA MONGAR, Coordinator  
Mat-Su Reentry Partnership  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified by invitation on SB 19.

BRANDON JONES, Superintendent,  
Highland Mountain Correctional Center  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered general questions about the tablet pilot program.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:29:54 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:29 p.m. Present at the call to

order were Senators Wielechowski, Gray-Jackson and Chair Kawasaki. Senator Bjorkman arrived soon thereafter.

**SB 64-ELECTIONS**

[3:31:11 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 64 "An Act relating to elections; relating to voters; relating to voting; relating to voter preregistration for minors at least 16 years of age; relating to voter registration; relating to the Alaska Public Offices Commission; relating to synthetic media in electioneering communications; relating to campaign signs; relating to public official financial disclosures; relating to the crime of unlawful interference with voting in the first degree; and providing for an effective date."

[3:31:44 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI solicited a motion.

[3:31:50 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON moved to adopt the committee substitute (CS) for SB 64, work order 34-LS0153\H, as the working document.

[3:32:04 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI objected for purposes of discussion.

[3:32:19 PM](#)

DAVID DUNSMORE, Staff, Senator Bill Wielechowski, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the summary of changes for SB 64:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Summary of Changes  
Introduced Version I to Draft CS Version H

The following provisions were **removed** from the bill:

- Section 3 relating to preregistration of minors.
- Section 20 relating to questioning of a voter who requested an absentee ballot.
- Section 30 related to the timing of scanning ballots.
- Section 38 related to synthetic media.

The following provisions from Senate Bill 70, introduced by the Senate Rules Committee by request of the governor, were **added** to this bill:

[3:32:57 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE continued with the summary of changes:

- Repealing the requirement that poll worker compensation be set by regulation.
- Allowing cover sheets for absentee ballot packets to be submitted electronically.
- Repealing the requirement for specific dimensions for voting booths.
- Beginning absentee ballot review 10 days before Election Day.
- Repealing the requirement that absentee ballots that arrive after the statutory deadline be counted during a recount.
- Adding becoming ineligible for a Permanent Fund Dividend to the list of criteria that triggers a voter roll clean-up notice. This provision was added to the criteria already in SB 64.

The following provisions were **added** to the bill:

- In the various statutes related to identification required for voting and registering to vote, tribal identification cards are added to the list of acceptable identification and hunting and fishing licenses are removed from the list. Where current utility bills, banks statements, paychecks, government checks, or other documents are allowed as identification it is clarified that these documents must be issued in the last 90 days. These provisions are in Sections 4-5, 24, 34, and 38.
- A new Section 16 was added to clarify that registering to vote through a Permanent Fund Dividend is not considered contacting the Division of Elections (Division) for purposes of the voter roll clean-up process.
- A new Section 45 was added clarifying that opening or tampering with a sealed ballot envelope without permission or breaching or hacking a voting machine is considered unlawful interference with an election. This provision

was originally included in Senate Bill 7 by Senator Shower in the 33rd Legislature.

- A new Section 46 adding disclosing the results of an election before the polls close to the crime of election official misconduct in the first degree. This provision was originally included in Senate Bill 7 by Senator Shower in the 33rd Legislature.

[3:35:02 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE continued with the summary of changes:

The following **changes** were made to existing provisions in the bill:

- In Section 26 related to unofficial election results, details of rejected ballots were removed from the list data that must be reported when unofficial results are released.
- In Section 28 related to the state review board process, existing statutory language suggesting that observers assist with the review is removed and ballot question campaigns are added to the list of campaigns who may have observers.
- In Section 35 related election materials in other languages the phrase "sample ballot" was added.
- In Section 43 related to ballot drop boxes, the new statute is renumbered to clarify these drop boxes will be available for all elections, the requirement for drop boxes outside of Division offices is removed, and municipalities are authorized to provide drop boxes under regulations adopted by the Division.
- In Section 47 related to cybersecurity, the lieutenant governor is given the responsibility for developing a cybersecurity program instead of the director.

[3:36:19 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI stated that SB 64 has grown to about 29 pages. SB 64 includes portions from the governor's original proposal back in January, the Senate Rules Committee version, and several bills this committee has worked on over the past two years. He said there shouldn't be anything entirely new or unexpected in SB 64.

[3:37:06 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked whether, with the removal of the synthetic media provision from Section 38, the new committee substitute includes any language addressing artificial intelligence and protections for broadcasters.

[3:37:29 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE answered that the provisions related to synthetic media were completely removed from the bill and will allow the committee to work on a more comprehensive approach that doesn't just include election provisions.

[3:37:52 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN stated that he's aware the Alaska Broadcasters Association raised a concern about their liability for election related synthetic media advertising and an AI policy may be an area the sponsor might consider including.

MR. DUNSMORE said there is nothing in SB 64 that would create additional liability.

[3:38:40 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated that SB 64 is still a work in progress. He said SB 64 was starting to feel top heavy, so the idea was to move synthetic media and AI issues to a separate bill. He stated that he was not opposed to including synthetic media and AI to SB 64 if the committee wants to include it.

[3:39:18 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI stated that he had mentioned SB 64 getting too long. He spoke with Senator Hughes from District M, who's interested in AI legislation and the possibility of moving the topic to her bill. He said adding synthetic media and AI is up to the committee. AI language was in both the original Rules committee version and last year's bill, so it's not new. He stated that the focus is to keep SB 64 focused on elections and registration.

[3:40:14 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked whether, given the national focus on required photo ID when voting, a photo ID requirement was considered and discussed during the drafting of this committee substitute.

[3:40:52 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE answered that this was the only voter ID provision submitted to his office by another legislative office during the

drafting process. He deferred the question to the sponsor of SB 64.

[3:41:15 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI answered that the policy aims to address perceived gaps in the election system. He said tribal ID cards were added as acceptable ID and removed hunting and fishing licenses since those often lack photos. Current law allows utility bills, bank statements, paychecks, or government checks, and his office extended the valid timeframe to 90 days to verify current info. He stated that a key concern with photo ID requirements is a lack of DMV offices in rural Alaska which leaves some eligible voters without photo IDs. He said the committee and sponsor need to tread carefully not to restrict anyone's constitutional right to vote, but he's open to discussion.

[3:42:55 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN asked whether current law allows a poll worker to permit someone to vote if the voter is personally known to them.

[3:43:17 PM](#)

MR. DUNSMORE answered yes, except when the voter has registered to vote electronically.

[3:44:14 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI opened public testimony on SB 64.

[3:44:35 PM](#)

LANI GERKEN, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 64 and stated that the changes are simple but important.

[3:46:03 PM](#)

DAVID ZIMMER, representing self, Palmer, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 64. First, he has voted by mail for years, but every year is required to submit a new application. He said it would be more efficient and cost-effective if the state created a permanent vote-by-mail request list. Second, he said he shouldn't have to pay postage to return his ballot. Postage should be prepaid.

[3:47:10 PM](#)

EMILY LEAK-MICHIE, Executive Director, The Alaska Voter Hub, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 64 and emphasized the importance of ballot curing, removing the witness signature,

providing prepaid postage, and adding a rural voting liaison. These changes address real challenges, especially for rural Alaskans and non-English-speaking communities.

[3:49:33 PM](#)

FRANCISCO (CISCO) MERCADO, Policy Director, Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT), Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 64 and read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 64 is necessary legislation that would reform several key parts of our Alaska election system by expanding voting rights and voting access. People need a system that ensures that all votes are accurately tabulated. SB 64 would create a ballot-curing process to ensure this. Including a ballot-curing process will allow voters to correct honest mistakes on their mail-in ballots. In the first year implementing the vote-by-mail system (2022), 4.5 percent of ballots were rejected by election officials, with a large percentage of those ballots from four House districts with greater percentages of minority voters and off the state's road system.

Another important feature of the bill is that it will allow same-day voter registration. Currently, 23 states and the District of Columbia allow voter registration up to and including election day. One of the benefits of this provision is that it effectively results in increased turnout of voters among the ages of 18 to 24. One of the reasons for this provision is that it benefits people who move residences ahead of an election which occurs more frequently among younger and low-income individuals. Please ensure that the final bill includes this provision.

Lastly, the bill would remove an unnecessary feature of voting by mail, the witness signature provision. The state currently does not verify signatures and eliminated 7,500 ballots due to this provision. This deprives our Alaska voters of the fundamental right to have their voice heard at the ballot box.

In conclusion, ACAT strongly supports SB-64 for all the above reasons. We strongly encourage you to support this bill.

[3:52:29 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI closed public testimony on SB 64.

[3:53:13 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI removed his objection. [He found no further objection and CSSB 64 was adopted as the working document.]

[3:53:18 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 64 in committee.

**SB 62-BOARD OF PAROLE: MEMBERSHIP, REPORT**

[3:53:23 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 62 "An Act relating to the board of parole; and providing for an effective date."

[3:53:54 PM](#)

SENATOR LOKI TOBIN, District I, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 62 introduced the following legislation and said not including medical or emergency care Alaska spends about \$73,730 annually to incarcerate one person, which is four times the amount spent per student. In 2024, Alaska ranked ninth in the nation for highest prison costs. Since 2020, the Parole Board has held 75 percent fewer hearings and released 79 percent fewer individuals, despite inmates completing rehabilitation programs. A recent audit found no clear explanation for the sharp drop in parole approvals. SB 62 would expand the Alaska Parole Board from five to seven members to reduce workload, as the board oversees over a thousand hearings each year. SB 62 adds seats for professionals with backgrounds in drug and alcohol counseling, mental health, and for an Alaska Native Tribal member—acknowledging that 80 percent of inmates struggle with addiction and 40 percent are Alaska Native. She said SB 62 also includes a seat for a crime victim, a crime victims family member, or a victim rights advocate. SB 62 aims to improve parole decisions through broader expertise, increase transparency with an annual report, and address Alaska's high incarceration rate and prison costs.

[3:59:53 PM](#)

LOUIE FLORA, Staff, Senator Loki Tobin, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 62:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**SB 62 Sponsor Substitute  
Version N Sectional Analysis**

**Section 1** - Amends AS. 33.16.020 (a) to expand the Alaska Board of Parole from five to seven members. As in current statute, these members are appointed by the Governor and subject to legislative confirmation.

**Section 2** - Amends AS 33.16.020 (b) by applying term limits of two five-year terms to members, replacing current statute which states that members shall serve staggered five-year terms, until their successors are appointed.

**Section 3** - Modifies AS 33.16.030 selection criteria for board members. Section 3 creates specific seats on the board, requiring one member to be a licensed physician; one to be a victim of a crime, family member of a victim, or a member of a crime victim's advocacy group; one member to have experience in drug or alcohol addiction recovery support; and one member to be part of a federally recognized tribe in the state.

**Section 4** - Amends AS 33.16.030 (c) by adding the requirement that not more than three of the board members may be current or former employees of a correctional institution.

**Section 5** - Amends AS 33.16.030 by adding a definitions section to include definitions for designated seats on the Board of Parole. The definition of "federally recognized tribe" at AS 23.20.520 is as follows: "a tribe that is recognized by the United States Secretary of the Interior to exist as an Indian tribe under 25 U.S.C. 5131 (Federally Recognized Indian Tribe List Act of 1994); and includes any subdivision, subsidiary, or business enterprise wholly owned by a federally recognized tribe"

[4:01:17 PM](#)

MR. FLORA continued with the sectional analysis for SB 62:

**Section 6** - Adds a new section of statute at 33.16.280 to require an annual report on Board of Parole operations and parole decisions.

**Section 7** - Uncodified law specifying that a member of the board who has previously served two or more terms may finish their term but shall not be reappointed.

**Section 8** - Establishes an effective date of January 2026.

[4:02:01 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced invited testimony and opened public testimony on SB 62.

[4:02:37 PM](#)

KAREN CANN, representing self, Eagle River, Alaska, testified by invitation for SB 62; as former deputy commissioner read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Parole is a critical component to keep communities and facilities safe in Alaska. Many incarcerated individuals participate in programs, education and counseling looking forward to being a better citizen, friend, and family member when they are released on parole.

Discretionary Parole allows incarcerated individuals the opportunity to be released on supervision to follow an approved reentry plan that will help support them to be successful in their community.

Individuals who apply to be seen by the Parole Board must see the Board as a fair, deliberate institution rather than a group of people who deny their application without explanation. I had conversations with far too many incarcerated individuals in Alaska who refused to apply for discretionary parole because it was a "waste of time". They felt chastised during the hearing, refused parole and not know when they would eligible again; "who would put themselves through that"?

The current Parole Board is comprised mostly of retired correctional personnel, and none have a

background in behavioral or mental health, human development, or similar fields of experience and knowledge necessary to accurately assess a person's risk to the community and approve a release plan that has the components for success. This bill would add these people to the Parole Board to help assess risk and approve a parole plan best designed for success.

[4:05:12 PM](#)

MS. CANN continued with her testimony:

I worked with a young man who served 10 years of a 16-year sentence. In that time, he addressed his substance use issue, became an auto mechanic, lost friends and family had a realistic reentry plan supported by DOC staff but was denied parole without being told what was missing in his plan.

According to 2023 data from the Parole Board's webpage, 5 percent of people released on discretionary parole had their parole revoked while 95 percent of individuals on Mandatory Parole, or when an incarcerated person is paroled at the end of their sentence, had their parole revoked.

The longer an individual is incarcerated the greater the financial burden on the people of Alaska. It costs about \$202 dollars per day to incarcerate an individual NOT including medical care for chronic diseases, specific geriatric care, end-of-life, or emergency care. Paroling just one person saves Alaska a minimum of over \$73,000 a year. The paroled individual then contributes to Alaska's economy in purchases and taxes verses draining the economy at \$202 per day.

The Alaska Board of Parole has granted parole in only 27 percent of discretionary parole cases over the last four years - far lower than historical trends. The low rate of approvals has not improved public safety and has contributed to overcrowding in facilities and ballooning budget costs for the DOC diverting resources away from things that make us safe and vibrant, including healthcare and education.

Please make the Parole system fair and accountable, keep communities and facilities safe and pass SB 62 to make Alaska's criminal legal system more just.

[4:08:00 PM](#)

MEGAN EDGE, Prison Project Director, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 62 and stated that in recent years, the board's parole grant rate has dropped to just 27 percent, far below historical trends, raising concerns about transparency and adherence to core principles. SB 62 would address this by adding members with relevant expertise, to improve evaluations. She said SB 62 would require annual reports, increasing transparency and accountability in decision-making. Arbitrary or unclear decisions can undermine public safety by either releasing those who pose a risk or keeping rehabilitated individuals incarcerated. She stated that by supporting successful reentry, SB 62 can reduce costs, support the economy, and help fulfill Alaska's constitutional promise.

[4:11:07 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI kept public testimony open on SB 62.

[4:11:40 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN stated that there were changes to SB 62 over the summer in response to community concerns. She said it takes a practical approach to improve transparency in unclear processes and highlights the importance of rehabilitation and hope in public safety. She stated that without a clear path forward, people may disengage from systems meant to help them safely re-enter society and contribute positively.

[4:12:59 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked for details on how a quorum would be formed with a seven-member committee, and whether it would be difficult to maintain such a committee given that other boards report struggling with vacancies.

[4:13:26 PM](#)

MR. FLORA responded that the current quorum requirement is three members but will increase to four members with a seven-member board.

[4:13:44 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 62 in committee.

**SB 71-PRETRIAL SERVICES SUPERVISION AGRMNTS**

[4:13:53 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 71 "An Act relating to pretrial services supervision agreements."

[4:14:44 PM](#)

JEN WINKELMAN, Commissioner, Department of Corrections (DOC), Juneau, Alaska, introduced SB 71 on behalf of the sponsor:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Given the state of our budget we are constantly reviewing all operations for opportunities to generate offsetting revenues without jeopardizing operations or public safety.

The pretrial services program was established in 2018. Currently, the state bears all costs associated with supervising individuals released to this service—even the costs for defendants charged with municipal offenses.

This bill would allow the Department to enter into agreements with municipalities to provide pretrial supervision for defendants charged with a municipal offense. These reasonable fees, similar to what we collect for those defendants who occupy a bed inside a facility, would allow the Department to recoup some of the cost for providing this service to municipalities.

There are currently 2 areas within the state who utilize this service for municipal charges- Anchorage and Juneau.

Let me take you on a journey.

Mr. Smith is arrested in Anchorage on a municipal charge and booked into Anchorage Correctional Complex. As with all arrests, Our DOC Pretrial Officers complete a risk assessment that is provided to the Court, prior to arraignment. A few options (but not all), the Court may consider if continued supervision is necessary is set bail and have Mr. Smith remain in custody—we have an agreement in place to charge for this placement. They may decide to release Mr. Smith to private EM at his own personal expense. Or they may decide to release Mr. Smith to pretrial services for

supervision with DOC. If Mr. Smith is released to DOC Pretrial Services, 100 percent of the cost is on the state because there is no mechanism or agreement for the state to bill the municipality for this service. This bill will allow us to enter into an agreement to bill for these services.

[4:17:34 PM](#)

APRIL WILKERSON, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Corrections (DOC), Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 71:

[Original punctuation provided.]

### **Pretrial Services Agreement**

#### **Sectional Analysis - Version 34-GS1507\A**

Section one AS 33.07.010 Pretrial services program; establishment is amended to add the clarification of being charged with a violation of state law.

Section two AS 33.07.020 Duties of commissioner; pretrial services is amended to add an exception for additional regulations to be adopted in consultation with the Department of Law, the public defender, the Department of Public Safety, the office of victims' rights, and the Alaska Court System.

Section three AS 33.07.020 adds a new subsection allowing the commissioner to enter into agreements with municipalities to charge for pretrial services and adopting regulations to establish the associated fees.

Section four AS 33.07.030(g) is amended to update the statute referencing the guidelines established by regulation.

Section five AS 37.05.146(c) allows the department to receive monies for pretrial supervision services.

Section six is the applicability section stating we shall supervise those who we were ordered to supervise before the effective date.

[4:19:27 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked what communities SB 71 would apply to.

[4:19:31 PM](#)

MS. WINKLEMAN answered any community that has a municipal prosecuting system. Currently Juneau and Anchorage are the only two communities.

[4:19:44 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated that SB 71 has a zero fiscal note and asked if 2.5 million dollars is the net positive revenue to the state of Alaska.

[4:19:55 PM](#)

MS. WILKERSON answered that is correct, the 2.5 million would be the maximum anticipated amount. The specific form and billing method would be determined through the regulation process.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked, since Anchorage is about ten times the size of Juneau, Anchorage would likely account for about 90 percent of the 2.5 million.

MS. WILKERSON responded that would be the estimated cost. The Department of Corrections (DOC) will work with the municipalities, and if SB 71 passes, DOC anticipates a potential budget change in FY 2027.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated that this means Anchorage residents would need to either cut 2.2 million from the budget or raise taxes by that amount to cover the costs.

[4:21:17 PM](#)

MS. WILKERSON answered yes, if the city chose to cover the full cost. However, there are other options, like the commissioner mentioned earlier, such as the defendant pays 100 percent of the cost to use private pretrial services. She said the actual impact would depend on how the city structures its program.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked what percentage of defendants would be able to pay the full cost of the private monitor service.

[4:22:13 PM](#)

MS. WINKLEMAN answered very few would be able to pay for the private monitoring service.

[4:22:26 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON asked if the DOC has heard back from the municipality of Anchorage about SB 71.

[4:22:46 PM](#)

MS. WILKERSON answered that the DOC has not heard back from the city of Anchorage.

[4:22:55 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN stated that the city of Seward recently closed its jail and asked if Seward was to reopen the jail would this requirement impact Seward and in what way.

[4:23:14 PM](#)

MS. WINKLEMAN answered no unless the city of Seward set up its own municipal prosecution and defense within the city.

[4:23:37 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked why a community would want to have its own municipal prosecutor versus letting the state handle everything.

[4:23:58 PM](#)

MS. WINKLEMAN answered that her guess would be a community would want to have its own municipal prosecutor because of the revenue for fees that are associated with charges against individuals.

[4:24:16 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated that he can see the city of Anchorage letting the State of Alaska handle all the cases. He said taking on those cases probably wouldn't be a financial benefit for the city of Anchorage.

[4:24:37 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked if a municipality decided they didn't want the expense of their own municipal prosecutor would the municipality be able to transfer the cases back to the state.

[4:25:23 PM](#)

MS. WINKLEMAN answered that there is a possibility for a municipality to transfer the cases back to the state, but conversations about funding would need to happen first.

[4:26:37 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 71 in committee.

[4:27:03 PM](#)

At ease.

**SB 19-PRISONERS: ELECTRONIC DEVICE ACCESS/USE**

4:27:29 PM

CHAIR KAWASAKI reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 19 "An Act relating to the use and possession of electronic devices by prisoners."

4:27:46 PM

SENATOR ROBERT MYERS, District Q, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 19 introduced the following legislation:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 19 was prompted by conversations with the Reentry Coalitions, the Department of Corrections, and members in the other body and has been around in some form for nearly a decade now. It is intended to address some of the main concerns in prisons and to help reduce recidivism.

One of the main struggles that prisoners face is with accessing education. Increasing the educational opportunities available to prisoners can improve their employment prospects following release and can significantly reduce the likelihood of recidivism. Allowing prisoners to access educational materials on tablets could have a substantial impact on how many gain honest employment rather than turning to a life of crime.

The Department of Corrections supports SB 19 because it reduces some of their administrative oversight requirements and could lead to lower costs. Services such as telemedicine and telephonic meetings with counsel would reduce the burden on Corrections of transporting prisoners and monitoring appointments.

With increased interest in rehabilitating prisoners who will be released back into our communities, tablets could provide a low-cost way to provide this option to inmates. The reality is that most incarcerated individuals will eventually be released, so providing them with rehabilitative services while they are in prison is a proactive attempt to make our communities safer when they get released.

[4:29:35 PM](#)

SENATOR MEYERS continued:

These tablets are not intended to be a luxury for prisoners; they facilitate connection to essential services and resources that will help reduce recidivism rates and promote safety on our communities. These are services that we already provide to prisoners but could be doing for lower costs with the implementation of tablet programs.

While many services will still be offered in person, providing tablets for prisoners would increase their access to education and rehabilitation programs that will hopefully result in lower recidivism and a safer community for all of us, all at a lower cost than what we currently provide these services for.

[4:30:27 PM](#)

ASHLYN BROOKS, Intern, Senator Robert Myers, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 19:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**SB 19 v. N- Sectional Analysis**

**PRISONER ACCESS TO COMPUTER/PHONE/TABLET**

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

**Section 1: Page 1, Lines 3-15; page 2, lines 1-31; page 3, lines 1-20;**

This section adds an exemption 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 fess for electronic device use.

**Section 2: Page 3, Lines 21-27** This new section states that electronic device services are meant to supplement existing services not to replace existing services to the extent practicable. Electronic devices may not be used to replace in-person visitation.

**Section 3: Page 3, Lines 28-31; page 4, line 1**

This section adds clarifying language regarding the applicability of the effective date.

[4:32:36 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI announced invited and public testimony on SB 19.

[4:33:03 PM](#)

TERI TIBBETT, Coordinator, Alaska Reentry Partnership (ARP), Juneau, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 19 and moved to slide 3, Partners. She stated that their partners include eight re-entry coalitions, community partners, that help with funding and management, and state partners that help align strategies.

[4:35:28 PM](#)

MS. TIBBETT moved to slide 4 and 5, SB 19 Access to Digital Technology in Prisons, and read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- SB 19 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 applications, 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 conferencing, closed circuit education channels, digital tablets, computer labs, and more.

[4:37:35 PM](#)

MS. TIBBETT moved to slide 6, Offender Returning to Incarceration Within 3 years of Release, and discussed the decrease in the recidivism rate.

[4:38:36 PM](#)

MS. TIBBETT moved to slide 7, Alaska Re-entry Efforts, and noted a few examples of actions taken that might have had an impact on Alaska Reentry efforts.

[4:39:26 PM](#)

MS. TIBBETT moved to slide 8, Alaska Data, and recommended a couple reports to look at for more information about recidivism rates and Alaska's re-entry efforts.

[4:39:52 PM](#)

MS. TIBBETT moved to slide 9, National Research, and read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

State-level incarceration rates are 23 percent lower since 2008. "States are achieving these rates with changes in policy and by increasing opportunities and resources to support employment and connections to behavioral health care and housing."

—Report from the National Reentry Resource Center, Council of State Governments Justice Center, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 50 States, :1 Goal: Examining State-Level Recidivism Trends on the Second Chance Act Era (2021).

[4:41:01 PM](#)

DON HABEGGER, Coordinator, Juneau Reentry Coalition, Juneau, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 19 and read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The mission of the Juneau Reentry Coalition is to promote strategies and engage in activities that serve justice-involved individuals, reduce recidivism, and improve community public safety. The coalition works on barriers and gaps in community services that inhibit successful reentry.

One barrier to success that the coalition has been working on for several years is access to digital technology while inside a Department of Corrections facility.

Although the Department of Corrections provides computer labs to help with digital literacy, recent history demonstrates that interruptions to traditional access methods are fragile. COVID and lab shutdowns are examples. Yet, during this same time, releases from incarceration continued.

Another quick example of current communication barriers is when an individual uses the Securus system to contact the Coalition Coordinator. If the individual places the call collect and a coalition coordinator is not available to accept the call, the system will not allow the individual to leave a voice message, breaking the communication chain and negating any possibility of help.

One program that illustrates reentry success through increased access to digital technology is The Last Mile, which was piloted in California's San Quentin more than ten years ago, and is now in eight states.

The Last Mile delivers advanced technology focused education such as programming and web development through safe and secure digital stations. The recidivism rate for The Last Mile graduates is less than 4 percent. 75 percent of The Last Mile returning citizens are gainfully employed - remarkable numbers.

Senate Bill 19 figuratively opens Alaska's prison doors to opportunities such as pro-social visitation, healthcare, and reentry planning. The Juneau Reentry Coalition urges the Senate State Affairs Committee to pass this much needed bill.

[4:45:23 PM](#)

MARSHA OSS, Coordinator, Fairbanks Reentry Partnership, Fairbanks, Alaska testified by invitation on SB 19. She told a relevant story and discussed two suggestions related to SB 19. She said first, planning before reentry is critical— digital tools would help build transition plans, support staff workflows, and allow applications to be ready before release. She said the Fairbanks Reentry Coalition supports SB 19 and DOC's push to expand tech access, enabling things like applying for IDs, Medicaid, and peer support. Second, access to education while incarcerated reduces recidivism, promotes mental well-being, and gives hope for future success. Staff fully support introducing digital tools and say it will help more inmates complete GEDs and prepare for release.

[4:51:30 PM](#)

BARBARA MONGAR, Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Partnership, Palmer, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 19 and read the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

I have been the coordinator for the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition for the last five and a half years. Our coalition consists of state agencies (such as the Alaska Department of Labor and the Alaska Departments of Corrections), community substance treatment centers (such as Set Free Alaska and True North Recovery), Mat-Su Health Services, Tribal Agencies, non-profit and private community service organizations. The close community partnerships we have through our Reentry Coalition has made it easier to provide wrap-around.

Our reentry case managers start the planning with individuals releasing from incarceration at least 30 days prior to their release. The wrap-around services our reentry case managers provide include comprehensive goal and case planning, housing supports, employment supports, parole/probation supports, and referrals for substance and mental health treatment.

[4:52:37 PM](#)

MS. MONGAR continued with his testimony:

Today, I am here representing the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition in support of Senate Bill - 19. This bill would help to remove barriers that restricts inmates

inside correctional institutions from utilizing certain electronic devices- such as computers or digital tablets- for improved access to rehabilitative programming and activities. We also support DOC's efforts to expand digital technology for vocational training, education, treatment and recovery, reentry planning, housing and employment assistance, telehealth, peer support, faith-based, tribal, visitation, and more while individuals are still incarcerated.

Early access to services increases the likelihood for individuals to successfully reintegrate into the community once they are released from incarceration and successful reentry means safer communities.

[4:54:21 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI concluded invited and public testimony on SB 19.

[4:55:07 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked about the progress of the pilot program at the Highland Mountain facility.

[4:55:25 PM](#)

MS. WINKLEMAN stated that the Department of Corrections is in support of SB 19 and said the commissioner's office has found the pilot program successful.

[4:56:38 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI asked how many units are currently in operations and what kind of device access issues has the facility run into.

[4:56:34 PM](#)

BRANDON JONES, Superintendent, Highland Mountain Correctional Center, Eagle River, Alaska, answered general questions about the tablet pilot program at the Highland Mountain facility. The facility has enough tablets for everyone, which currently houses just over 300 people. He said the program is going well, the facility is laying the groundwork by providing access to a digital library, DOC policies, procedures, and the inmate handbook. He stated that professional visits are done on separate, non-recorded tablets, and the introduction of electronic mail for friends and family has been very popular. He said facility messaging allows staff to quickly share updates with individuals or the whole population, such as changes to meals or activities. He said the facility is also piloting a

digital system for requests and grievances, replacing the old handwritten process with faster same day responses.

[4:59:25 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS reiterated the commissioner's testimony.

[5:00:15 PM](#)

CHAIR KAWASAKI held SB 19 in committee.

[5:01:18 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Kawasaki adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 5:01 p.m.