

**GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL
EDUCATION**

**LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Videoconference Host:

Governor's Council
550 W. 7th Avenue, Suite 1220
Anchorage, Alaska

Meeting Date

December 6, 2023
1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Attendees:

Caitlin Poindexter, Chair
Art Delaune
Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus
Corey Gilmore
Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich
Jena Crafton
Rep. Stanley Wright
Chelsea Burke
Margaret Evans
Carl (CB) Brady
Dave Fleurant
Director Duane Mayes

GUESTS:

Michael Christian
Amanda Coelho
Anna Williams
Gail Sorensen

Staff:

Patrick Reinhart
Jamie Kokoszka
Rich Saville
Samantha Vetter
Lanny Mommsen
Michael Stevenson
Robert Tasso

Prepared by: Sheila Garrant, Peninsula Reporting

CALL TO ORDER – 1:04 p.m.
ROLL CALL – Quorum established

WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR

Introductions, Announcements, or Good News

Caitlin Poindexter welcomed attendees to the meeting. She encouraged people to put questions or comments in the chat.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

No conflicts of interest were declared.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA and MINUTES

Jena Crafton **MOVED** to approve the December 6, 2023 meeting agenda as presented, **SECONDED** by Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**.

Chelsea Burke **MOVED** to approve the November 6, 2023 meeting minutes as presented, **SECONDED** by Jena Crafton. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**.

REPORTS

Chair Report

Caitlin Poindexter welcomed CB Brady as the newest member of the Legislative Committee, thanked Representative Wright for joining the meeting, and allowed each to introduce themselves.

CB Brady, the executive director at the Center for the Blind, shared that he advocates for the blind and visually impaired. He noted that he is legally blind and appreciates being on the committee to advocate for change.

House Representative for District 22 Stanley Wright shared that he wanted to be on the Council because his son is autistic, and his family experienced many struggles with the school system. He said he looks forward to strengthening a pathway for people with disabilities.

Caitlin Poindexter reported that she attended a day of the Reducing Recidivism Conference and shared that it was an exciting and powerful event. The main takeaway for her was that preventative and proactive measures are vital to reducing recidivism. She had an opportunity to connect with the Brain Injury Foundation's representatives, who said there is no space for brain injury on IEPs and shared the impact on students who experience brain injury and need an IEP.

GCDSE Staff Report

Patrick Reinhart reported that the Council is planning for the annual advocacy trip to Juneau. The Council expects members to arrive in Juneau on February 12, 2023, and meet all day on February 13, 2023. They will meet half the day on February 14th jointly with the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), after which Council members will be involved in advocacy meetings with the 60 legislators and/or their staff. Council members will be scheduled with their legislators and perhaps others. Patrick said if Council members have personal connections with a legislator outside their district, let staff know so they can use that information when scheduling appointments.

Patrick Reinhart commented that the Council is considering asking Hope Community Resources' deaf navigation team for training on deaf culture and issues important to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community before Council members go to Juneau to meet with legislators. They are also considering asking Hope Community Resources' deaf navigation team to provide a lunch-and-learn opportunity open to legislators to offer them information and educate them on deaf and hard-of-hearing issues.

Council staff reported the following information:

- The 2024 Stone Soup Group Parent Conference is scheduled for March 21 – 22, 2024. Registration is open.
- The Governor's Council is partnering again with the Alaska State Special Education Conference (ASSEC) to sponsor the Inclusive Practice and Paraeducator of the Year Awards. This year's award breakfast will be on Tuesday, February 7, 2024. Nominations will be accepted for an individual or group. Nomination forms are available at the Council and will be accepted until December 27, 2023. Rich Saville is the lead staff on the awards event.
- The Council welcomed two new Council members, Garrett Dominick, a self-advocate from Kenai, and Marlene Wenger from Copper Center, a parent of an adult with significant and multiple developmental disabilities.

BUSINESS

AKLeg.gov Presentation

Jamie Kokoszka provided a walk-through of the AKLeg.org website. She noted that it is a resource to track bills, watch bill hearings, and contains a calendar of hearings. The website can also assist with finding legislators, committee contact information, and publications. Caitlin Poindexter recommended that Council members identify their legislative representatives before the Juneau Council meeting.

Representative Wright remarked that besides reading a bill's full text, the bill sponsor statement is valuable as it explains why the legislator has brought the bill forward. The section analysis also explains the language used in the proposed legislation.

2023 State Legislative Updates and Discussion

Staff shared the Council's position papers related to outstanding legislation from the last session as follows:

- HB 111 (Deaf and Hard of Hearing)
 - Sits in House Finance awaiting hearing
 - Companion Bill SB 143 was introduced
 - The Deaf Education Board identified edits to the language of the proposed legislation as follows:
 - Add ASL as a method of communication as an option
 - Remove “cued speech” and “total communication” as options as they do not apply to Alaska and are outdated methods of communication
 - Change the definitions of “deaf” and “hard of hearing” in the bill, as they are deficit-focused.
 - **Update:**
 - The DEB board chairs met with the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) to discuss language. Rich Saville will meet with DEB Chair Courtney Westmann and the NAD to finalize the draft language.
- Centralized Accommodation Fund (CAF)
 - A budgetary item that got vetoed in the Governor's final budget
 - The Trust included it in its recommendations to the administration
 - One of the top recommendations in the AWMTF report
 - The CAF will be brought forward again next session
 - The Council will consider whether or not to present it as a capital project
 - **Update:**
 - The Employment Committee's review yielded no input. Council staff will update the position paper with additional links and suggest it may be better as a capital project versus in the operating budget.
- SB 104/HB 161 (Civil Legal Services Fund)
 - A Council bill in 2018
 - Alaska Legal Services (ALS) is in dire need of appropriate funding
 - The bill promotes moving back to 25% of legal fees collected by the state going to ALS
 - **Update:**
 - The Governor's Council will support the bills through letters of support and possible public testimony.
- HCBS Efficiencies
 - There are five points in the Governor's Council's HCBS efficiencies position paper.

1. Increase savings and self-determination by offering an option for some people with I/DD to direct their services in a more independent and flexible way
 2. Better facilitate environmental modifications (E-Mods) such as smart home technology, physical accessibility, and remote monitoring to ensure greater independence for HCBS recipients
 3. Initiate Adult Companion services
 4. Consider softening or removing other regulatory barriers to HCBS services
 5. HCBS Medicaid rate structure is flawed, outdated, and needs an objective overhaul. Ask: Give the Department of Health the direction and tools necessary to address our DD system crisis.
- **Update:**
 - The CISS Committee is considering creating a separate position paper for E-Mods.
 - Discussion of potential Council-supported/initiated bills
 - Caitlin Poindexter recommended supporting criminal justice-related bills for people with disabilities.

Update on Federal Issues

- Section 504 Rule Change
 - Corey Gilmore and Robert Tasso reviewed the federal registry for the proposed rule change, which would amend Section 504 of the Rehab Act of 1973. It is universally supported nationwide. The Council submitted comments in support of the changes after consulting with numerous organizations and stakeholders.
- SB 1332, DSP Act
 - The Council sent thank you letters to Senator Murkowski and Representative Peltola for supporting the legislation.
- HCBS Relief Act of 2023
 - It is sponsored by Senator Bob Casey, and it relates to increasing HCBS compensation, addressing the waitlist, and facilitating greater community integration.

NACDD Federal Updates:

- TASH Resource
 - <https://tash.org/about/public-policy/>
 - TASH advances equity, opportunity, and inclusion for people with disabilities with a focus on those with the most significant support needs in the areas of education, employment, and community living through advocacy, research, and practice.

OTHER

Patrick Reinhart noted that the Full Lives Conference is scheduled for April 10-11, 2024 in Anchorage. The Disability Policy Seminar is also scheduled for early April. The Council plans to participate remotely.

DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next Legislative Committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 10, 2024 from 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

GOOD OF THE ORDER AND ADJOURNMENT

Chelsea Burke **MOVED** to adjourn, **SECONDED** by Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**, and the meeting adjourned at 2:27 p.m.