

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

**LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**Videoconference Host:**

Governor's Council  
550 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 1220  
Anchorage, Alaska

**Meeting Date**

January 11, 2024  
1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

**Attendees:**

Caitlin Poindexter, Chair  
Art Delaune  
Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich  
Jena Crafton  
Rep. Stanley Wright  
Chelsea Burke  
Margaret Evans  
Carl (CB) Brady

**GUESTS:**

Michael Christian  
Amanda Coelho  
Jason Caputo

**Staff:**

Patrick Reinhart  
Jamie Kokoszka  
Rich Saville  
Samantha Vetter

**Prepared by:** Sheila Garrant, Peninsula Reporting

**CALL TO ORDER – 1:01 p.m.**  
**ROLL CALL – Quorum established**

## **WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR**

### **Introductions, Announcements, or Good News**

Caitlin Poindexter welcomed attendees to the meeting and encouraged members to contribute to the discussions.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS**

No conflicts of interest were declared.

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA and MINUTES**

Margaret Evans **MOVED** to approve the January 11, 2024 meeting agenda as presented, **SECONDED** by Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**.

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

## **REPORTS**

### **Chair Report**

Caitlin Poindexter reported that she attended the Reducing Recidivism Conference at the end of November and had an opportunity to connect with representatives from the Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRC). Caitlin plans to meet with Sarah Moreau from SERCC via Zoom on Monday, January 22, 2024.

### **GCDSE Staff Report**

Patrick Reinhart reported the following Council information:

- The legislative session starts Tuesday, January 16, 2024. This is the second year of a two-year session.
- The Council will work jointly with the SILC on legislative presentations.
- The staff has been working on updates to the holdover proposed legislation and finalizing new position papers for new proposed bills.
- Staff is working on setting up appointments for Council members to meet with lawmakers or their staff.
- The Council requested a social function at the Governor's House in Juneau. The request was approved, and an event hosted by Lieutenant Governor Dahlstrom is scheduled for Tuesday, February 15, 2024 from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

- Robert Tasso is no longer a staff at the Council. The planner III position will not be posted for a few months.

Jamie Kokoszka shared the following information:

- The Trust Joint Advocacy meetings begin January 19, 2024, 12:15 – 1:15 p.m. Staff sent an e-mail to members with details on how to participate.
- The Stone Soup Group Parent Conference is scheduled for March 21 – 22. Registration is open.
- The Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference is scheduled for February 5 – 7, 2024.
- Empower Hour has resumed. The next meeting is scheduled for January 18, 2024 from 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. The theme is Key Campaign.
- SDS has started the Individual and Family Office Hour on the first and third Monday of each month. The Zoom link was e-mailed to members.
- The Self-Advocacy Summit hosted by Peer Power is scheduled for April 26 – April 28, 2024. Registration will be open soon.

## **BUSINESS**

### **AKLeg.gov**

Representative Wright reported he met with Representative Allard regarding Bill HB 111, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing bill, and Rep. Allard would be willing to update the committee on the bill. Senator Gray-Jackson proposed the companion bill, SB 143.

Patrick Reinhart shared that the Council plans to meet with Rep. Allard to discuss language adjustments to the bill. Patrick noted that the Council intends to ask Rep. Allard or Sen. Gray-Jackson to host a Lunch & Learn about deaf culture when the Council is in Juneau.

Jamie Kokoszka reminded the committee that AKLeg.gov is a valuable resource for tracking legislative activity during the session. She noted that a fact sheet with links to the legislative process in Alaska was attached to the meeting agenda.

### **2024 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.
  - The DEB board members 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.
- **Update (January 11):**
  - Council staff met with Courtney Westmann to discuss the changes and whether they were substantial or minor. Ultimately, the changes were deemed minor, and moving forward is appropriate. The language changes mirror what the national advocacy group uses in its advocacy. Council staff, Courtney, and Rep. Allard will meet next week to discuss the changes.
- Centralized Accommodation Fund (CAF)
  - A budgetary item that got vetoed in the Governor’s final budget
  - 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
  - The Council will consider whether or not to present it as a capital project
    - 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.
  - **Update (January 11):**
    - Patrick Reinhart asked Director Duane Mayes to speak to the commissioners of Labor and Administration and remind them that the CAF was one of the highest priorities of the Alaska Work Matters Task Force report.
    - The Trust has agreed to include it on its advocacy agenda.
    - Still considering making it part of the capital budget versus an operating budget request.
- 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.
  - The Governor’s Council will support the bills through letters of support and possible public testimony.
  - **Update (January 11):**
    - The Council has not drafted a position paper but has testified at various hearings.

- 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 the DD system crisis.
      - The CISS Committee is considering creating a separate position paper for E-Mods.
  - **Update (January 11):**
    1. The Council is working on focusing the position paper on home modifications and participant-directed waiver services and defining the ask.
- HB 219, Repeal Assistive Technology Loan Program
  - Jason Caputo shared an overview and history of the proposed legislation:
    1. The AT Loan Program was established in 1995 by Alaska statute. The program’s primary services are to partner with a bank to offer low-interest rate loans to low-income Alaskans with disabilities so they can acquire the AT needed. There was a one-time infusion of funds to establish the program.
    2. DVR is the lead agency for the AT Act.
    3. The flaws in the program made it highly inefficient to use the funds. Thus, the effort is to move the funds for more efficient use.
    4. Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA) receives federal AT funds with models that are proven to work.
    5. The effort includes transferring the AT Loan Program to ATLA, stipulating that the funding would only be used for AT Act-authorized services. DVR would continue to monitor the AT Loan Program activities.
    6. Representative Saddler agreed to sponsor the proposed bill.
  - In partnership with DVR, the Council proposes drafting a simple position paper supporting the change.

Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich **MOVED** to support HB 219, **SECONDED** by Chelsea Burke. Hearing no points of discussion nor objection, the motion **PASSED**.

- Public and Community Transportation
  - Patrick Reinhart reported that the Alaska Mobility Coalition (AMC) is a trade association of organizations that provide community and public transit. It was started by the Council and the SILC many years ago.
  - AMC developed position papers related to public and community transit, a summary of which follows:
    1. Support Human Services Transportation Grant Program (\$1.25M)
      - The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) has recommended \$250K in AMHTA funds matched with \$1M in state general funds/mental health.
        - The Governor has included this funding in his draft FY'25 budget.
    2. Transit match funding (\$1M)
      - The federal government provides grant programs for transit programs. Many more opportunities exist to apply for senior, disability, and public transit-related grants. To apply, applicants must provide matching funds, sometimes up to 50%, depending on the program.
      - The ask is that the legislature provide \$1M to transit sub-recipients to help meet the local match requirement.
    3. Put public and community transportation in statute.
      - The Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) has many responsibilities in its statute, but none deal directly with public and community transportation.
      - The ask is the legislature should put public and community transportation in the statute requiring DOT&PF to report annually on progress.

Art Delaune **MOVED** to support a white paper on the public and community transportation bill, **SECONDED** by Margaret Evans. Hearing no objections, the motion **PASSED**.

Patrick Reinhart reported that the Council will be headed to Juneau in February with six position papers. Art Delaune recommended prioritizing the position papers to prepare for limited audience time.

### Update on Federal Issues

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.

## **DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

Caitlin Poindexter recommended scheduling a Legislative Committee meeting before the trip to Juneau. The next Legislative Committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for February 7, 2024 from 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. The March Legislative Committee meeting is scheduled for March 5, 2024 from 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

## **GOOD OF THE ORDER AND ADJOURNMENT**

Jena Crafton **MOVED** to adjourn. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**, and the meeting ended at 2:29 p.m.

DRAFT