

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

**WINTER COUNCIL MEETING  
MEETING MINUTES**

**Meeting Location  
350 Main Street  
Alaska Office Building, Suite 115  
Juneau, Alaska 99801**

**February 11 – 13, 2025**

**Tuesday, February 11, 2025**

**Council Members:**

Jena Crafton, Chair  
Sabrina Richmond, Vice Chair  
Director Tony Newman  
Art Delaune  
Caitlin Poindexter  
Carl (CB) Brady  
Christine Bohan  
Corey Gilmore  
Dave Fleurant  
Don Enoch

Elizabeth Joseph  
Garrett Dominick  
Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus  
Lisa McDonald  
Margaret Evans  
Mariah Krueger  
Anna Attla  
Myrna Johannsen  
Nona Safra

**Council Staff:**

Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director  
Michael Stevenson  
Jamie Kokoszka  
Lanny Mommsen  
Rich Saville  
Ian Miner  
Chelsea Burke

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

**CALL TO ORDER – 9:00 a.m.**

**MINDFULNESS MOMENT**

**ROLL CALL/ZOOM REMINDERS – Quorum established**

**APPROVAL OF THE MEETING MINUTES**

**Caitlin Poindexter MOVED** to approve the October 2024 meeting minutes as presented, **SECONDED** by **Lisa McDonald**. Hearing no opposition, the motion **PASSED**.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**Lisa McDonald MOVED** to approve the meeting agenda, **SECONDED** by **Garrett Dominick**. **Patrick Reinhart** noted scheduling changes to the agenda. **Myrna Johannsen MOVED** to approve the amended agenda, **SECONDED** by **Garrett Dominick**. Hearing no opposition, the motion **PASSED**.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS**

No conflicts of interest were declared.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INTRODUCTIONS**

**Chair Jena Crafton** opened the floor for announcements and introductions. Attendees introduced themselves and shared a fun fact about their lives.

**COUNCIL CHAIR REPORT**

**Chair Jena Crafton** reported that she attended the following events:

September and October 2024:

- Trust's Improving Lives Conference
- Shared Vision 2.0 workgroup meetings
- Disability & Aging Summit
- Independent Living Conference

November and December 2024/'25:

- Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) Conference in Washington D.C., presented on FASD
- Trust CEO application review and interview panel
- Trust board meeting
- Project SEARCH luncheon.

**Jena Crafton** reported participating in the following activities in January and February 2025:

- New Trust CEO, Dr. Mary Wilson, was approved
- Attended the Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference (ASSEC), presented the Inclusive Practice Awards
- The community forums have begun for the Council's five-year planning
- Preparations for the Juneau Council meeting.

**Jena Crafton** reported the following upcoming events:

- National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD) Conference Planning Committee (2026)

- Key Campaign, March 18 – 19, 2025.

**Chair Crafton** shared that she has a new puppy named Boo. She's six months old, and **Jena** has been enjoying her immensely.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT**

**Patrick Reinhart** shared the following update:

### **Council Member and Staff Updates:**

- Council members moving on:
  - Ken Hamrick, Center for Human Development representative.
- New Council members:
  - **Mariah Krueger**, DVR representative
  - **Myrna Johannsen**, parent representative
- Council members whose terms are expiring June 30, 2025:
 

◦ <b>Margaret Evans</b>	◦ <b>Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich</b>
◦ <b>Anna Attla</b>	◦ <b>Christine Bohan</b>
◦ <b>Jena Crafton</b>	◦ <b>Liz Joseph</b>
◦ <b>Art Delaune</b>	◦ <b>Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus</b>

**Patrick Reinhart** noted that Council members who wish to continue to serve on the Council must make it known in writing to the Governor's Office, Boards and Commissions.

### **Executive Director Highlights:**

**Patrick Reinhart** reported that he participated in the following events from October through the beginning of February:

- National Executive Director Leadership Forum, Phoenix, Arizona
- GCDSE staff retreat at BP Energy Center
- Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities (AADD) face-to-face meeting and the Employment Systems Retreat
- Independent Living Conference
- Trust meetings and CEO Candidate Meet & Greet
- Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (OIDD) council engagement call
- Guidehouse rate review meetings
- Infant Learning Program (ILP) Eligibility Expansion Leadership Group meetings
- Shared Vision Workgroup meetings
- NACDD future conference planning meetings
- Five-Year Plan meetings
- Living Well report meetings
- Legislator meetings on legislative priorities
- Provided an AGEnet presentation on transportation
- NACDD business (finances, board meeting, emergency meeting on federal grant memo)
- Key Coalition Fly-In planning meetings
- Council meeting planning and invites
- Inclusive Practice Awards luncheon
- Provided the Trust with a presentation on Council activities.

### Executive Director Upcoming Events:

- Legislative session participation and monitoring
- Federal updates and monitoring
- Key Coalition Fly-In, March
- State Plan community forums.

### Other Events:

- Full Lives Conference, April 10 – 11, 2025
- Spring Council meeting, May 14 – 15, 2025 in Anchorage

**Patrick Reinhart** reported that he will be out of the office from April 8 – 18, 2025.

## **STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Community Inclusion, Supports and Services (CISS)**

CISS Committee Chair **Corey Gilmore** shared the following update:

- Committee members:
  - **Corey Gilmore, Art Delaune, Margaret Evans, Dave Fleurant, Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus, Lisa McDonald, Elizabeth Joseph, Nona Safra, Marlene Wenger, Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich, and Christine Bohan**
- Committee staff:
  - **Chelsea Burke**

**Corey Gilmore** reported that the CISS Committee is committed to supporting the actualization of the Shared Vision. He said the potential of the Vision cannot be fully understood without being a part of the community. Since the last Council meeting, the committee has participated in Shared Vision 2.0 discussions, advocated for universal changing spaces, which was an issue brought forward to the committee by a concerned parent; had a conversation with Division of Public Assistance Director Etheridge about SSI, Medicaid, and auto-eligibility; and learned about the different types of waivers.

**Corey Gilmore** recommended that the Council pay attention to activities on the federal level related to home and community-based waiver services as they are not a right under the Medicaid waiver system.

**Corey Gilmore** reported that the priorities for the housing listening sessions include plain language housing rights and increased education and information about the environmental modification program offered by SDS. The committee is looking into creating a housing PSA.

Kim Champney reported that the Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities (AADD), Southeast Alaska Independent Living (SAIL), and the Trust are working on operational issues within the e-mod program. She noted that system issues make it challenging for people to access e-mod benefits. She expects that in six to eight months there will be better access to the program.

### **Self-Advocacy & Leadership Committee (SA&L)**

SAL Committee Chair **Garrett Dominick** shared the following update:

- Committee members:
  - **Garrett Dominick, Christina Bohan, Jena Crafton, Anna Attla, Art Delaune, Margaret Evans, Corey Gilmore, Elizabeth Joseph, Nona Safra, Marlene Wenger, and Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich**
- Committee staff:
  - **Jamie Kokoszka, Lanny Mommsen**

**Lanny Mommsen** reported the Council hosted the *I Have Rights* self-advocate panel at the Disability and Aging Summit. The panel consisted of past and present Council members, including **Anna Attla, CB Brady**, and Lucy Odden. Approximately 75 people attended both in person and virtually. The presentation was well received.

**Garrett Dominick** reported that the Governor's Council submitted a proclamation request to the administration to celebrate Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, which takes place in March.

**Garrett Dominick** shared upcoming events as follows:

- SA&L meetings:
  - March 27, 2025, 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
  - April – 17, 2025, 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
- A new self-advocacy panel presentation titled *Advancing Advocacy* is set to launch in the summer/fall of 2025.
- Full Lives Conference, April 10 – 11, 2025:
  - The Council is offering registration fees and possibly other support
  - The Council will be present as an exhibitor
  - Keynote speakers include Zack Gottsagen (Peanut Butter Falcon) and Ric Nelson (Unstoppable, The Ric Nelson Story)
  - DSP awards will be presented at the conference. Nominations are being accepted at the Center for Human Development.

**Garrett Dominick** shared that in December of 2024, Anchorage passed a law allowing individuals with disabilities to park free at any downtown parking meter. A free disability parking permit can be obtained through <https://www.easyparkalaska.com>. The digital permit links to your license plate and is valid for one year. He recommended asking a representative from EasyPark to speak to the Council about the parking benefit.

### **Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC)**

ICC Chair **Sabrina Richmond** and Council staff **Rich Saville** reported the following update related to the Infant Learning Program expansion:

- The ICC has had numerous meetings with the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) related to the expansion efforts.
- The Council has been involved in creating legislative presentations, and members have met with multiple legislators to garner support and sponsors for the proposed expansion.

**Sabrina Richmond** reported the following data from the ILP Annual Performance Report (APR):

- Referrals are up by 189
- Enrollment is up by 253
- Data on the 11 core indicators show that ILP met targets on most indicators and experienced minor slippage on the family outcomes survey.

**Rich Saville** reported that Amy Simpson has been working with Senator Tobin and Representative Mina's offices on drafting a bill for the ILP expansion. Rich noted that they are expecting a draft bill by next week.

The ICC's next meeting is scheduled for April 8, 2025 from 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

### **Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)**

SEAP Vice Chair **Sabrina Richmond** and Council staff **Rich Saville** shared the following update:

#### ***2025 Inclusive Practice Awards:***

- The 2025 Inclusive Practice Awards were presented at the Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference. Alicia Rodarte-Gouldin, a para-educator at Mountain View Elementary in Kenai; the Chugiak High School Life Skills team; and Winter Marshall-Allen, a special education teacher at Homer High School, were recognized for their dedication to inclusive practices.

**Sabrina Richmond** reported that John Clark from Anchorage School District presented the Youth Outcome Dashboard to the panel at their last meeting. The dashboard's purpose is to provide real-time data on post-school outcomes to measure the success of transition programs. The benefits of the dashboard include informed decision-making for schools and parents, tracking long-term outcomes, and accountability for transition. The key metrics include education, employment, and independent living.

**Rich Saville** noted that the SEAP has not had a presentation from DEED on its federal reporting. Don Enoch reported that the APR was submitted to the federal government on time. DEED is preparing a survey to ask the SEAP if they want to raise or lower any of the targets on the indicators. After the SEAP makes those decisions, they will include them in the new APR draft.

The SEAP's next meeting is scheduled for April 22, 2025 at 10:00 a.m.

### **Employment Committee**

Employment Committee Chair **Anna Attla** shared the following update:

- Committee members:
  - **Anna Attla, Jena Crafton, Lisa McDonald, Margaret Evans, and Mariah Krueger**
- Committee staff:
  - **Samantha Vetter**

**Anna Attla** reported the following committee activities:

- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Governor's Council co-hosted the Employment First Conference:
  - Total participants: 90 in person, 67 virtually

- Total exhibitor booths: 17
- Total speakers: 18
- Held an Alaska Work Matters Task Force meeting on November 6, 2024
- Commented on the federal proposed Rule 14c (subminimum wage)
  - Alaska has already repealed subminimum wage, but many states have not.

**Project SEARCH Activity:**

- Current 2024/2025 Cohort:
  - Anchorage Providence Medical Center – 6 students
  - Fairbanks Memorial Hospital – 6 students
  - Mat-Su Regional Medical Center – 5 students
- Teachers continue to finalize '23/'24 cohort employment outcomes for the 17 graduates
- Joy Burgess, the new Cincinnati Children's Hospital liaison, assisted with:
  - Continued discussions for partnerships to open new Project SEARCH site
  - Handouts and recruitment materials/events
  - Preparation for July 2025 Austin, Texas Project SEARCH National Conference.

**Patrick Reinhart** reported that there are Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Pathways Grant funds available to start one or two new Project SEARCH sites. The Council has been actively working on recruitment.

**Alaska ABLE Accounts:**

- Accounts increased by 15% for 2024, a total of 1244 accounts
- Assets increased by 26% to \$14,962,065
- Withdrawal of \$1,836,630 for disability expenses
- The current annual deposit is \$19,000 per year
- Additional \$18,810 for ABLE to Work contributions (Alaska amount)
- Total account balances are limited to \$400,000, with \$100,000 or less excluded from SSI resource limits
- ABLE Age Adjustment Act will begin in January 2026, increasing the age of disability onset from 26 to 46.

Council members recommended disseminating ABLE account information through various social media accounts to reach people who may not be aware of the benefit.

**Disability Innovation Fund – Pathways Grant**

- Partners include the Governor's Council, the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), SAIL, and the Center for Human Development (CHD)
- Continued bi-weekly meetings with the DIF team
- Presented on February 3, 2025 at the Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference.

**Microenterprise Grants (Alaska Mental Health Trust funded):**

- The Council supports self-employment for Alaskans with developmental disabilities by serving on Microenterprise Grant Committee

- Staff reviews, gives input, and provides recommendations on Microenterprise Grant applications:
  - Grant applications are processed two times per year
  - There were 17 total applications reviewed from October 2023 through April 2024.
    - Seven of the 17 were DD applicants
    - Total funding granted was \$96,551.29
  - Applications due 12:00 p.m., March 5, 2025.

**Anna Attla** noted that the Employment Committee is looking for more members. Anyone interested can contact her or **Lannie Mommsen**.

### **Special Education Service Agency (SESA)**

SESA's Executive Director Olivia Yancey shared a PowerPoint presentation titled *Winter Updates 2024 - 2025* and highlighted the following information:

- SESA board:
  - Board president **Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus, Anna Attla, Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich, Elizabeth Joseph, Rich Saville, Don Enoch**, Dr. Madeline Aguillard, Micaela Kolerok, and Heather Wheeler
- Mission: SESA provides consultation and training to support the unique educational needs of individuals and the Alaskan communities that serve them.
- About SESA: SESA is an educational service agency comprised of a low-incidence disability (LID) service, including a statewide lending library. LID includes autism, deaf and hard of hearing (DHOH), vision impairment, emotional disabilities, and multiple disabilities. In addition, SESA operates three grants:
  - Alaska Autism Resource Center (AARC)
  - Alaska Deaf-Blind Project
  - Alaska Center for Accessible Materials (AKCAM)

### *Funding for SESA (FY 2025):*

- |                              |                      |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| • State of Alaska            | \$3,438,070 (84.48%) |
| • Federal pass-through state | \$ 480,000 (11.79%)  |
| • Direct federal             | \$ 136,305 ( 3.35%)  |
| • Interest & other           | \$ 15,200 ( 0.37%)   |

### *Since August 2024:*

- SESA has provided technical assistance to over 13,274 Alaskans.
- SESA programs have offered over 77 site-based, district, and state-wide trainings for Alaskans on evidence-based or best practices related to the educational program of students with low-incidence disabilities. Over 47% of these trainings were conducted via distance delivery (e.g., Zoom).
- SESA LID programs have offered and provided support to 503 students and their school teams.
- SESA has produced 322 customized student or patron-focused reports offering recommendations and guidance.
- SESA specialists have made 114 onsite consultations or trainings for Alaskans.



- Alaska Center for Accessible Materials has created and connected 19 accessible educational materials projects for school teams and their students with print disabilities.
- Alaska Autism Resource Center has conducted 20 trainings and 15 community outreach activities.
- The Anne Freitag Library has 1,290 patrons and continues to do outreach across the state during conferences, Facebook, and the SESA newsletter to share what is available at the statewide lending library.
- Satisfaction surveys report that 96% gain knowledge as a result of technical assistance.

#### *LID Programs:*

- LID Autism Program Goal:
  - Provide distance and onsite technical assistance to support the educational and training needs of individuals with autism, their school district teams, and the Alaskan communities that serve them.
  - Olivia Yancey reported that the LID programs are currently maxed out based on the number of students they can take. There are no students currently on the waitlist.
- LID Emotional Disabilities Program Goal:
  - Collaborate and consult with rural teams regarding the program and student needs. Provide face-to-face, distance synchronous and asynchronous training on various topics affecting students with emotional/behavioral disorders.
  - Assist team with onsite visits and distance delivery to create, maintain, and enhance specific programs that meet the needs of students with emotional behavioral disorders.
- LID Visual Impairment Program:
  - Provide distance and onsite technical assistance to support the educational and training needs of individuals with vision loss, their school district teams, and the Alaskan communities that serve them.
- LID Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program Goal:
  - Provide distance and onsite technical assistance to support the educational and training needs of individuals with hearing loss, their school district teams, and the Alaskan communities that serve them.
- LID Multiple Disabilities Program Goal:
  - Collaborate and consult with rural teams regarding the program and student needs.
  - Provide small and large group training on various topics affecting students with multiple disabilities.
  - Assist teams in person through distance delivery to create, maintain, and enhance specific programs that meet the needs of students with multiple disabilities.
- LID participants across districts FY '25

- Total Number of Participants Served: 3168
- Total Number of Districts Served: 46

#### *Alaska Autism Resource Center (AARC):*

- The AARC's mission is to serve the needs of individuals with autism spectrum disorders, their families, caregivers, and service providers throughout the state of Alaska. SESA provides information, referral, training, and consultation via onsite and distance delivery. The AARC served 266 individuals in FY '25.

#### *Alaska DeafBlind Project:*

- Alaska DeafBlind Project's mission: Serve any individual from premature birth to age 22 with hearing and vision loss. Specialists serve in urban and remote areas and serve individuals not enrolled in school and those in secondary school.
- Total number of participants served was 267.

#### *Alaska Center for Accessible Materials:*

- Alaska Center for Accessible Materials (AKCAM) mission: Collaborate with school districts to provide accessible educational materials (AEM) throughout Alaska. SESA continues to be an authorized user of the National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC) and an alternative materials producer to provide education to districts regarding using the NIMAS/NIMAC system to meet the needs of students who need AEM.
- The total number of participants served was 133 in FY'25.

Olivia Yancey shared success stories highlighting the work of the dedicated staff and valuable programs at SESA. She spoke about the resources of the Anne Freitag Library, including books, sensory materials, toys and games, and accessible reading materials. She shared a list of the library collections and book lists.

#### *Upcoming events:*

- March 20, 2025: AARC hosting a free webinar, "Water Safety with Ms. Dayna." The presenter, Dayna Harvey, has more than 20 years of experience teaching children with autism.
- March 26, 2025: AKCAM presenting a free webinar, "Tear Down Reading Barriers with Bookshare." Participants will learn to navigate Bookshare, a free, accessible e-book library for students with certain reading barriers.
- April 26, 2025: Annual Autism Awareness and Acceptance Walk at Special Olympics in Anchorage. This year the AARC is hosting a statewide virtual walk-a-thon. People from all over the state can sign up and track how far they walk in April.

Olivia Yancey outlined the referral process, including a list of forms and required documents. She gave SESA's contact information and encouraged Council members to contact SESA for further details.

### **LEGISLATIVE VISITS DISCUSSION AND TRAINING**

**Jena Crafton** directed **Patrick Reinhart** to share the 2025 legislative visit schedule. **Patrick Reinhart** reported that each team has a schedule, and Council members are tasked to share only the Council's legislative priorities during the legislative visits.

**Jamie Kokoszka** shared a PowerPoint titled *Meeting with Your Legislator*. The purpose of the training is to prepare for legislative visits. She highlighted the following information:

- Before the meeting:
  - Make sure that you have talking points and handouts, contact information, and a camera to take photos
  - Designate one person on your team to be a note taker
  - Decide who will discuss each topic
  - Arrive five to ten minutes early
  - Check-in with legislative staff.
- Keys to a successful meeting:
  - Take a photo of the appointment schedule
  - Review the position papers
  - Read the legislator bios
  - Practice reading the position papers aloud.
- Introductions:
  - Mention if you live in their district
  - Make a personal connection (if any)
  - Explain why you are involved with the Council and the Council's role.
- During the meeting:
  - Give legislative packet to the legislator
  - Explain the position paper talking points/asks
  - If they are a sponsor, thank them for their support
  - Ask for their support if they are not a sponsor.
- Explaining the position papers:
  - Briefly describe the issue
  - Ask if they have questions or comments
  - Inform them that a Council staff member will follow up to see if they have additional questions.
- At the end of the meeting:
  - Thank them for their time
  - Ask for a group photo.
- After the meeting:
  - Go to the Council public lounge in the legislative building
  - Debrief with Council staff member
  - Note taker – complete the feedback form
  - E-mail photos with the legislator to staff.

**Jamie Kokoszka** reintroduced the Council's legislative priorities as follows:

1. Infant Learning Program
2. SESA funding
3. Public and community transit
4. Adult changing tables
5. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Child Bill of Rights
6. Funding priorities:
  1. State access and functional needs coordinator
  2. Deaf navigator program funding

**Jamie Kokoszka** reminded the Council members that the packet given to the legislator includes the Council position papers and the Council's Annual Report. The members' packets include talking points and the visit schedule. **Caitlin Poindexter** shared a list of things to do, including being respectful, turning off your phone, watching the time, and staying on topic; and things not to do, including answering questions about things you don't know, interrupting, texting or talking on the phone, bringing up unrelated topics, or arguing with a legislator. **Jena Crafton** additionally advised members to be genuine, share an interesting story about your life, talk about shared interests, ask them for their address, and send them a card on a holiday.

Council members and staff spent considerable time reviewing each position paper and discussing the talking points.

### **OPEN DISCUSSION**

**Patrick Reinhart** asked **Director Anthony Newman** to relay information that the division is aware of related to federal Medicaid program changes. **Director Newman** reported that last week was turbulent, including emergency meetings due to frozen federal funding as well as phone calls and e-mails from the public asking about the impact on benefits. At that time, he understood that individual benefits were not supposed to be impacted. At the same time, the Medicaid payment portal reported that all payments were suspended due to the federal funding freeze. There was a lot of confusion for several hours. The national advocacy organizations called emergency meetings and were at a loss to explain what was going on, and it was all changing by the hour. The commissioners met to draft a statement regarding the situation because the information was changing too quickly.

**Director Newman** reported that the national advocacy organizations held a call where it was reported that Medicaid cuts are being readied, and there has been little resistance from the states regarding the proposed changes. For instance, the Medicaid expansion population gets reimbursed at 90%; the proposal is to make that 50%. There is a proposal to change the 50% minimum of federal matching funds that all states receive. And then there's long been talk about replacing Medicaid with block grants, giving states block grants and letting them decide how to use them. **Director Newman** said that nothing has been formally proposed.

**Patrick Reinhart** said the news from the Council's national advocacy organization is that they have overloaded the switchboards of Congress with "protect Medicaid" messages because of the concerns of significant cuts. He understood that many legislators come from state systems that are very dependent on Medicaid, and they understand it. They don't know what the proposals are from the administration and haven't seen anything to respond to except for the general message of protect Medicaid.

**Patrick Reinhart** reported that the Council requested a meeting with Congressman Begich because he's new and the Council doesn't have a relationship with him. They will meet on Friday to emphasize the importance of Medicaid, particularly to people who are dependent on HCB waivers, seniors, and people with disabilities, and make the case that any change that got rid of that part of the program would be devastating, not only to the people that the Council serves but also would likely end up costing more because people will end up in more expensive institutional care settings.

**Director Newman** expressed concern that DEI has been expanded to DEIA, adding accessibility. He noted that every corner of SDS is about accessibility. The division has had to answer whether their grants address DEIA initiatives. The answer was no, they don't because they are not directly tied to the executive order.

**Patrick Reinhart** reported seeing a memo from the Office of Human Resources for the federal government saying all laws related to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 are relevant and not being touched. They are getting pushback from the disability community that they can't override the ADA.

### **RECESS**

The meeting recessed at approximately 4:00 p.m.

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

**COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

**Zoom Videoconference  
350 Main Street  
Alaska Office Building, Suite 115  
Juneau, Alaska 99801**

**February 11 - 13, 2025**

**Wednesday, February 12, 2025**

**Council Members:**

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Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus  
Kayla McDonogh

**Council Staff:**

Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director  
Michael Stevenson  
Jamie Kokoszka  
Samantha Vetter  
Lanny Mommsen  
Ian Miner  
Chelsea Burke

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

**CALL TO ORDER – 8:30 a.m.**  
**ROLL CALL/ZOOM REMINDERS – Quorum established**

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (DOH)**

DOH Deputy Commissioner Emily Ricci and Dr. Robert Lawrence, Alaska's chief medical officer, joined the meeting and shared the following information:

**Ongoing work in the department:**

- The DOH is focused on four Arcs of Effort:
  - Childcare, recognizing that providing for childcare helps communities.
  - Strengthening the behavioral health system, recognizing that addressing issues associated with behavioral health helps communities.
  - Overdose and suicide prevention, recognizing an increase of individuals being lost in many communities to overdose or suicide, and it includes injury prevention in general.
  - Transformation of care, which is a broad term focused on asking how to make sure the state is improving and sustaining quality care in communities while lowering the cost and making sure the dollars spent are going towards improving care and service to people in the community.

Dr. Lawrence reported that with regard to the transformation of care, there is a bill proposed in the legislature called the Complex Care Residential Homes (HB 73). He thanked the Council for supporting the bill and reported that DOH partners with the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS) to work on complex care cases. They conduct weekly meetings to review cases, and a larger group meets to ask the system questions. The Complex Care Committee did a root cause analysis to determine the needs and identify where complex care individuals live. Currently, there is no ability to license a home setting in statute. Dr. Lawrence noted that the next steps include determining what services could be provided in a home setting and how to pay for them.

Dr. Lawrence reported that because of the legislation passed last year, the state can set up an umbrella contract that allows them to look for ways of addressing health-related needs, not necessarily medical or clinical needs, but needs that will support people's health. D.C. Ricci added that one area of focus for DOH is on nutrition, recognizing the role of nutrition in helping individuals with complex or chronic conditions. Part of what they are looking at is the things that can be done in the Medicaid program that make sense, support health, and are cost-effective. She noted that the work is ongoing, and the next step is to bring a contractor on board.

**Patrick Reinhart** commented that the Council has received many inquiries about the changes at the federal level and its impact on Medicaid, and he stressed the importance of Medicaid for the Council's beneficiaries in terms of home and community-based services. He emphasized how important it is for the population the Council serves and hopes the state understands the importance of maintaining those services, particularly to avoid institutionalizing people unnecessarily or people having to migrate to different communities because they are unable to get the supports to stay in the communities they choose to live in.

D.C. Ricci replied that the department plans to track ongoing activity at the federal level and ensure that from the state's perspective, they are prepared to evaluate the impact of any potential proposals and gauge the totality of the effects. She added that there might be benefits to some of the ideas, as well as challenges. The department's job is to monitor, track, and evaluate the potential impact and take action from there based on the impact. She added that they cannot be reactionary or speculative.

### **DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES (DFCS)**

DFCS Commissioner Kovol joined the meeting to share the following information:

Initiatives the department is working on:

- Strengthening lives
- Innovative solutions
- Collaborations with community partners and families
- Delivery of services
- Addressing the needs of patients, clients, and residents

Commissioner Kovol cited examples of the cultural connective programs for youth and families, person-centered care, including evidence-based practices and service models, and the developing neurofeedback models and TBI screening.

Commissioner Kovol reported that there is a big push to address workforce wellbeing. Directors are encouraged to hold town hall meetings or fireside chats so that staff can communicate topics of concern as they need to. DFCS leadership holds town halls every quarter and makes themselves available to residents, patients, and staff.

Commissioner Kovol reported that with regard to innovative solutions, the department is working on many items, including software and hardware using EHR API integrations to enable different healthcare software systems to communicate and share data. They have made huge progress with the workforce initiatives, and the talent acquisition team has taken recruitment from 45 to 10 days. They have seen considerable reductions in turnover and vacancies.

Commissioner Kovol reported the following information:

- The Complex Care Unit is very busy as they staff cases with the help of partners. They don't do case management but are looking for efficiencies at the system level.
- Pioneer Homes has an 86% capacity. The reason why it is below 90% is because of the workforce challenges in Fairbanks. She noted that 61% of elders in Pioneer Homes have been diagnosed with dementia-related disease.
- There has been an increase in the foster care base rate, and since that went into effect, foster care applications have increased.
- The Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is at 90% capacity. They are starting facility work at McLaughlin and have a request with the legislature to move funding over to McLaughlin to do more work to make space.

### **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT**

DEED Commissioner Deena Bishop joined the meeting to share the following information:



### *Reads Act:*

- School districts are in the third year of implementing the Reads Act, and this is the first year of accountability. The state has seen positive growth. Alaska outgrew the nation for its students to be on step in K, 1, and 2 grades. The Reads Act focuses on the science of reading. The goal is to ensure that students are reading at level in the third grade. Sixty percent of students leaving kindergarten move into the first grade on level. This is significant regarding early intervention and an emphasis on communication with families.

### *Students in Correspondence Programs:*

- It is reported that 18% of all students are in correspondence programs, and they serve students with disabilities. Over time, there has been contention to include a special needs factor in funding for parents and school systems that serve special needs students. The Governor supports increasing the special needs category in this year's legislative session.

### *Healthy Futures Challenge*

- DEED houses a grant program that is offered to SDS and other entities to access additional funding to keep kids active.

### *Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month*

- February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month. There is specific training that is mandatory for teachers and students.

### *Student Fentanyl Awareness Competition*

- Currently, there is competition in schools related to fentanyl, including a student-led campaign called *One Pill Can Kill*.

### *Summer Food Service Program*

- DEED is looking for summer food service programs to sponsor. DEED will coordinate with entities to ensure that Alaska's kids have access to food.

### *The Alaska Science, Technology, and Education Conference (ASTE) Conference 2025*

- Theme: StoryBytes
- February 15 – 18, 2025 at the Captain Cook Hotel, Anchorage
- Registration is open
- Highlights assistive technology and demonstrates tech used in school to support learning.

### *Cellphones in Schools*

- There are some policy changes about eliminating cell phones in schools. Any provision for cell phone use for a medical device or learning assistance would not be included in that prohibition.

### *Perkins V Post-secondary Grant Proposals*

- Funding is available for career and technical education (CTE) programs. The grants range between \$50,000 and \$150,000 annually for three years. The grant targets post-secondary students, CTE instructors, and dual credit programs.

### *United States Senate Youth Program*

- Several Alaskan students will attend the U.S. States Youth Program to meet senators, the president, and other leaders, and each student receives a \$10,000 college scholarship.

### *Alaska Safe Children's Act Curriculum*

- Free, teacher-facilitated curriculum for grades 7-12
- Focused on preventing violence and promoting healthy relationships
- Includes interactive learning experiences and implementation guides.

### *E-learning Keys to Beginning Reading*

- Alaska Reads Act course available online
- There are open-source materials accessible to anyone who wants to broaden their understanding of the science of reading.

### *Bond Reimbursement and Grant Review Committee Recruitment*

- The committee is seeking three members with expertise in school construction and facilities management
- Four-year term starting March 1, 2025.

Commissioner Bishop shared the department's contact information as follows:

- General support and assistance:
  - [eed.contact@alaska.gov](mailto:eed.contact@alaska.gov)
- Special education-specific information:
  - [Donald.Enoch@alaska.gov](mailto:Donald.Enoch@alaska.gov)
- Additional information or to sign up for the InDEED Newsletter:
  - <https://education.alaska.gov>

**Patrick Reinhart** reported that three legislative priorities in the Governor's Council's packet are education-related: the ILP expansion, SESA funding, and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children's Bill of Rights. He shared the Council's appreciation for DEED's support.

Commissioner Bishop noted that SESA and other support agencies have reported recruitment and retention needs. She shared that DEED has an apprenticeship model program that supports paraprofessionals, which will be valuable for recruitment and retention.

## **STATE PLAN UPDATE AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Chelsea Burke** directed the members' attention to the *FY '27 – '32 Five-Year State Plan Development Update* and highlighted the following information:

### *What is the Five-Year Plan:*

- The plan guides GCDSE's work for the next five years (2027 – 2032).
- The five-year plan holds the Council accountable for how it spends federal funding.
- The five-year plan is used to develop goals for the next five years. The goals inform the committee work, and from there it gets more detailed into objectives

and ultimately into work plans with specific activities that guide the day-to-day work of the Council.

- The Five-Year Plan educates policymakers and the public about the needs and work done in the state.
- Other items in the plan describe the Council structure, how the input was gathered, and why the goal areas were selected.

*Process and steps to creation:*

- The Council is working on the value goals and areas of emphasis while hosting community forums. Staff will create an analysis of the data from community forums and use that to draft priorities that the Council members will ultimately vote on.
- Community forums:
  - Council staff will host forums in approximately 13 communities
  - Additional forums will be virtual
  - Opportunity to engage in a community conversation
    - Share experiences
    - Find out what is working well and what are the challenges
    - Encourage survey participation, collect data.

**Chelsea Burke** noted that the Council has held two forums, one in Juneau and one in Fairbanks. A forum is scheduled for March 21, 2025 in Anchorage. Other locations include Palmer, Wasilla, Eagle River, Homer, Kodiak, Nome, Bethel, Ketchikan, Sitka, Valdez, Kenai/Soldotna, and three virtual forums with targeted audiences.

*Adopting core values:*

- Mission – what (improving the lives of Alaskans with disabilities)
- DD Shared Vision – why (it is the future)
- Values – how it gets done (things that guide the work)
  - Values of the DD Act:
    - Independence
    - Productivity
    - Integration
    - Inclusion
    - Self-determination
    - Protection
    - Advocacy
    - Quality of Life

Chelsea Burke invited members to break into small groups, review and discuss the values, and provide feedback. After the breakout session, the Council members' feedback included:

- *Independence:*
  - Include transportation
  - Include empowered.
- *Productivity:*
  - Possibly tying it to Employment First language
  - People with DD add value to society through income-producing jobs.
- *Protection:*
  - Include a safe space to be
  - Include respect

- Protection is old language. Is the value in protecting or ensuring safety, collaboration, and partnerships?
- *Self Determination:*
  - Possibly changing "self-determination" to "autonomy."
- *Advocacy*
  - Use plain language
  - Exchange the word "speak up" to "communicate."
- *Unclear or missing:*
  - Identify cultural recognition of who we are as Alaskans and the importance of our Native communities
  - Missing the importance of resource navigation
  - Responsible stewardship of the public's resources.
- *Other comments:*
  - Overlap in independence and self-determination, they repeat each other. Combine values. One value could be a mix of independence, self-determination, and advocacy; the second could combine inclusion, integration, and productivity; and the third could be a mix of protection and quality of life.
  - Group homes do not have many of the values. To have these values, the group home would have to be run by residents who chose the values of the home through self-direction and self-governance.

*Next steps:*

- Finalize and adopt core values (spring meeting)
- Complete community forums
- Data from forums and surveys will be collected and organized into priorities
- Data will be presented to Council members at the Council's fall 2025 meeting
- Council members will vote on priorities to guide the next Five-Year Plan.

**DOH CONTRACTOR GUIDEHOUSE PRESENTATION ON HCBS WAIVER RATES**

**Director Newman** introduced Poorna Suresh, an associate director with Guidehouse, who joined the meeting and shared Guidehouse's history and experience. The Department of Health contracted Guidehouse to conduct a long-term services and supports (LTSS) rate study for the following programs and services administered by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services (SDS) and Division of Public Assistance (DPA):

- 1905(a) Personal Care Services – State Plan
- 1915(k) Community First Choice Services – State Plan
- 1915(c) HCBS Waivers
- LTSS Targeted Case Management – State Plan
- Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with DD (ICF IDD)
- The Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982 (TEFRA) Program

*The purpose of the LTSS rate study:*

1. Increase healthcare access to all Alaskans.
2. Review existing rate methodologies and compare them to other states.
3. Understand differences in costs and rates between geographies within the state.
4. Review rates for similar services offered across programs and divisions for

Alignment.

5. Engage with community partners, such as Tribal Health Organizations (THOs)
6. Adjust rate methodologies to respond to people of all age groups and level of need
  - a. Complete a financial analysis that supports sustainability
  - b. Provide recommendations for implementation.

*Key deliverables:*

1. Project Workplan
2. Peer State Comparisons
3. Provider Survey
4. Rate Models
5. Fiscal Impact Analysis
6. Final Report with Rate and Implementation, Recommendations

*Timeline:*

August 2024 - July 2025

*Approach to meet goals:*

- Collaboration with community partners
  - Invited participants:
    - Lived experience – listening sessions with individuals receiving LTSS, families, and natural supports
    - Rate workgroup – 24 representatives of provider associations and providers impacted by rate changes, reflecting the full range of services and geographies, understanding provider finances, reporting capabilities, and service costs
    - Tribal organizations – Representatives of THOs.

Poorna Suresh shared that with regard to the listening sessions, Guidehouse's goal is to hear from people in the LTSS system and their natural supports. Guidehouse welcomes your participation if you are:

- A person with lived experience receiving LTSS
- A family member, friend, or person who supports people with lived experience

Additionally, Guidehouse is offering two sessions for the convenience of participants and to increase attendance:

- Session One: March 24, 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. (AKST)
- Session Two: March 24, 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. (AKST)
  - The sessions will cover the same material, so you do not need to attend both.

## **PUBLIC TESTIMONY**

A public testimony period was offered, and a full transcript was prepared.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Caitlin Poindexter MOVED** to adjourn, **SECONDED** by **Myrna Johannsen**. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**, and the meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.