

# **2017 CAPITOL CURRENTS**

*30<sup>th</sup> Alaska State Legislature ~ 1<sup>st</sup> Session*

**16<sup>th</sup> Edition – 5/1/17 – 5/7/17 –**

**~ WEEK OF SCANDALS ~**

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

Alaska House members are demanding Representative Eastman apologize for saying some women are glad to become pregnant so they can receive Medicaid-funded travel to have abortions. So far, he's declined.

Speaker Edgman join with three other rural representatives – Representative Foster, Westlake, and Fansler – in demanding Eastman apologize.

Representative Tarr raised the issue of censuring Eastman.

The last time a lawmaker was censured was in the early 1990s, when the Senate censured George Jacko for a series of ethics-law violations.

Eastman's comments have received criticism from both parties, including from Republican Minority Leader Charisse Millett.

Also this week Senator David Wilson slapped a reporter when the reporter sought the senator's opinion on a recently published article.

House Majority Leader Chris Tuck says censure is the least the Senate can do after the Alaska Dispatch News [released audio](#) Tuesday of Wasilla Senator David Wilson allegedly slapping the reporter.

The Senate leadership says it won't comment until a police investigation is complete.

## **BUDGET ISSUES**

Below are the budget items awaiting action in the conference committee for the state's operating budget including the Mental Health Trust's recommended actions.

While the conference committee members have not yet been appointed, we expect the members to include the co-chairs of the Finance Committees:

Senators Hoffman and MacKinnon and Representatives Seaton and Foster.

We need to contact these legislators to inform them of our priorities.

Look over the following "conference-able items" and communicate your "priorities" to the legislators above and cc your own legislators.

## **Conference Committee Items**

DHSS = Department of Health & Social Services

DEED = Department of Education & Early Development

PS = Public Safety

## **HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES ISSUES**

### **Public Health Nursing (DHSS)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** +\$500,000 transfer from Public Health Administration

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** -\$1.9 million

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for Public Health Nursing.**

*Impact:* The Senate reductions will eliminate 11 positions and force the closure of public health centers in Kenai and Kodiak, adding to the recent elimination of 40 positions statewide including the nurses that provided services in Seward, Cordova, Haines, Wrangell, Galena, Fort Yukon, and Delta Junction. Public health nurses provide community health services, including immunizations, prenatal counseling and postpartum outreach, senior care, well-child exams, TB screening and treatment, school screenings, STD screening, and health education. Community Health Centers cannot bill for the majority of services public health nursing provides, and will not be able to pick up those services. The result will be a loss of prevention health care in those communities. Public health nurses also work in the community to provide health education, emergency preparedness plans, community health assessments, and more.

### **Medicaid Prescription Drugs (DHSS)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** No increase, no reduction

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** -\$2.9 million

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for Medicaid Prescription Drugs.**

*Impact:* The Senate proposal to cut Medicaid Pharmacy services by \$2.9 million (\$1.9 million in federal funds and \$973,500 in state general funds) will result in further cost containment and prioritization of prescription medications, which could affect beneficiary medication regimens, causing negative health consequences and reduced functioning that can affect an individual's ability to work, go to school, parent, and remain stable in the community.

### **Adult Preventative Dental Services (DHSS)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** No increase, no reduction

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** -\$288,000

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for Adult Preventative Dental Services.**

*Impact:* A 10% reduction in Adult Preventative Dental Medicaid services will result in some beneficiaries going without access to medically necessary dental care, which will result in higher utilization of other services – particularly emergency rooms services for untreated abscesses, pain, and collateral health consequences from poor dental health.

### **Behavioral Health Medicaid Services (DHSS)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** +\$15.8 million

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** -\$462,000

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for Behavioral Health Medicaid Services.**

*Impact:* Additional Behavioral Health Medicaid funds are needed to ensure the goals of Medicaid reform AND criminal justice reforms are met. Both systems rely on timely access to appropriate behavioral health services to avoid more expensive alternatives like hospitalizations and incarceration. Reductions in access to community behavioral health services will result in increased pressure on API, increased utilization of emergency departments, and long waits for treatment.

Pre-trial diversion efforts will be affected by limited access to treatment to avoid incarceration.

**Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) (DHSS)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** No increase, no reduction

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** -\$631,300 cut

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API).**

*Impact:* The Senate reduction would eliminate premium pay for nursing staff. API is already struggling to recruit and maintain staff due to the complexity and acuity of its patient population. Without the financial incentive of premium pay, API will not be able to compete for highly qualified staff – which will affect the health and safety of patients (and staff) in the hospital and increase the risk and cost to the State for workplace injury, inappropriate seclusion and restraint, delayed admissions, and patient complaints.

**Front Line Social Workers (DHSS)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** -\$225,000 reduction

**House:** +\$4,972,000 increase

**Senate:** -\$886,200 reduction

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for Front Line Social Workers.**

*Impact:* The Senate reduction would eliminate six full-time positions responsible for ensuring quality of services, client grievances and appeals, compliance with federal performance improvement plans, foster care payment processing, and other duties. Staffing and resource limitations will also impair the division's ability to locate and assess relatives for foster care placement. The increase recommended by the House would add 31 positions and improve training that would help OCS serve families better and bring caseloads down to a safer and more manageable level, closer to professional standards.

**Adult Public Assistance (APA) (DHSS)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** No increase, no reduction

**House:** Reduces surplus funding in Public Assistance and gives it to OCS front line social workers

**Senate:** -\$3.5 million

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for the Alaska Public Assistance program.**

*Impact:* Department projections indicate a reduced APA caseload, resulting in \$3.5 million of "excess" funding. The House proposed using \$3.3 million of this excess funding to support front line social workers in OCS. The Senate reduction would eliminate the \$3.3 million (not transferred to OCS) and an additional \$210,000, for a total of a \$3.5 million reduction to the program. APA provides cash assistance to Alaskans in need, whether they are elderly, blind, or disabled, to help them remain independent and in the community.

**Public Assistance Field Services (DHSS)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** +\$1.3 million

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** -\$828,000

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for Public Assistance Field Services.**

*Impact:* The Senate reductions will eliminate 13 positions and force the closure of public assistance field offices in Homer, Kodiak, Sitka, and Kotzebue. Bethel staff will be reduced. Thousands of Alaskans that depend on public assistance programs will have to work through fee agents or through urban offices, increasing the delay in processing applications and determining eligibility for Medicaid, Food Stamps, and other programs.

Most field services staff are case workers serving people who temporarily need public assistance to care for their families, with some caseloads as high as 100 families per worker. Field service staff provide training, conduct fraud investigations, collect claims, help develop plans for becoming self-sufficient, and measure the performance of the division's programs and staff.

### **Alaska Temporary Assistance Program (ATAP) (DHSS)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** No increase, no reduction

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** -\$3 million

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for the Adult Temporary Assistance Program.**

*Impact:* The Senate's \$3 million reduction, on top of last year's \$7 million reduction, will compound ATAP's existing deficit and increase the need for a supplemental request in 2018 to avoid a penalty by the federal government for failure to meet its maintenance of effort obligations. If that happens, the federal government will reduce dollar-for-dollar the state's federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) grant the following year. The program provides cash assistance and work services to low-income families with children to help with basic needs while they work to become self-sufficient.

### **Alaska Pioneer Homes (DHSS)**

**Governor FY18 budget:** No increase, no reduction

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** -\$6.5 million

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for Pioneer Homes.**

*Impact:* The Governor's budget, released in December, announced a 2.75% (\$5.7 million) reduction to personnel in the state's Pioneer Home budget. This cut is expected to result in the loss of two nurses, six nurse's aides, and one part time nurse's aide—requiring the closure of 26 beds. Over the past three years, the division has lost 38 positions, resulting in the closure of nearly 30 beds across the six homes, and an increased wait time for people on the waitlist. The House maintained the Governor's recommendation in their version of the budget and did not recommend any increases or reductions. The Senate, however, recommended an additional \$5.7 million "unallocated" cut to the division/department. As has been widely reported, DHSS reported that closure of one or more Pioneer Homes is the only way to deal with the additional \$5.7 million cut. On April 13, however, the Senate passed a declaration directing DHSS to spread that amount throughout the department to avoid closing any Home. The Governor also sent a letter, stating that he will do everything he can to ensure that no Home is closed while he is governor.

## **EDUCATION ISSUES**

### **Parents as Teachers (DEED)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** No increase, no reduction

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** -\$500,000 (in the Early Learning Coordination allocation)

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for Parents as Teachers.**

*Impact:* The Senate cut will eliminate the Alaska Parents as Teachers program to provide parent education and family support services to families of young children in more than 50 communities and villages statewide. Certified parent educators work closely with parents to provide information and tools that promote language development, intellectual growth, social development, and motor skills. Delivery includes home visits and multi-family group activities.

### **Best Beginnings (DEED)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** No increase, no reduction

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** -\$320,000 (in the Early Learning Coordination allocation)

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for Best Beginnings.**

*Impact:* The Senate reduction will eliminate Alaska's Best Beginnings program to serve families across the state in promoting early education and literacy. Best Beginnings is a public-private partnership that focuses on parent engagement and education, community support for early childhood, language and literacy.

### **Pre-Kindergarten Grants (DEED)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** No increase, no reduction

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** -\$2 million

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for Pre-K grants.**

*Impact:* The Senate recommendation would eliminate grant funds for in-school preschool programs that serve low-income families. Pre-K program grantees help children learn social and academic skills needed to be ready for kindergarten, working in classrooms and as outreach to families who prefer in-home care for their preschoolers. Public schools may use grant funds to subcontract with family child care centers, faith-based settings, Head Start programs, and private child care centers to provide these services.

### **K-12 Aid to School Districts (Base Student Allocation (BSA)) (DEED)**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** Fully funds the BSA

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** -5% cut to the BSA

**Ask: Please support the House recommendation for the Base Student Allocation (BSA).**

*Impact:* The Senate reduction will likely result in the prioritization of core education components and reduce funding for support programs and services that serve students with disabilities.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES**

### **Counsel on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault**

**Governor's FY18 Budget:** Reduces the grants line by \$340.0-- \$200.0 for batterer intervention community-based programs and \$140.0 for children's services in shelters

**Governor's FY18 Amended Mental Health Budget:** \$1 million increase for prevention, evaluation and services in rural/remote areas

**House:** Same as Governor

**Senate:** Reduces UGF \$200.0 to fund a Bethel-based Trooper position

**Ask:** Please support the House recommendation for CDVSA

*Impact:* The Senate reduction will reduce needed shelter/rape crisis center services for victims

## **GOVERNOR'S CORNER**

<http://gov.alaska.gov>

Governor Bill Walker issued the following statement following passage of the American Healthcare Act (AHCA) in the U.S. House of Representatives:

“This bill could be a game-changer for Alaska. Our state would be the most negatively affected if the proposed legislation gets signed into law as is. Alaskans already pay the highest health care premiums in the country. Affordable health care coverage is critical to provide necessary treatment resources to address the opioid epidemic in Alaska. My team and I will continue working with members of our Congressional Delegation to ensure Alaskans are protected and covered.”

## BILLS ON THE MOVE

### HOUSE COMMITTEE OR FLOOR ACTION

#### HB 1 / Election Registration and Voting

Transmitted to Senate on 5/1. Referred to STA, JUD on 5/4.

Allows qualified voters to register to vote within 30 days or on the day of an election to vote a questioned ballot; enhances online voter registration with electronic signatures to make the registration process quicker and easier; ensures the same early voting locations are available during every election; creates an option for permanent absentee voting for individuals that plan to vote by mail every year; and clarifies terminology for early voting to remove confusion between early voting and absentee in-person voting.

#### HB 74 / Driver's License and ID Cards and Real ID Act

Scheduled in FIN on 5/9 and 5/11.

Companion is SB 34. Allows DMV to issue both REAL ID federal compliant and noncompliant identification cards and driver licenses as a citizen of Alaska requests. This in turn will allow our residents to access military facilities, other federal facilities, and pass through TSA checkpoints at airports with these proper compliant cards. Otherwise, a U.S. passport, other recognized passport, and other federally issued identification documents will be necessary to fly to the lower-48 or gain access to a federal building.

#### HB 159 / Opioids; Prescriptions; Database; Licenses

Scheduled in FIN on 5/11.

Companion is SB 79. Provides an option for patients to execute a "Voluntary Nonopioid Directive" that would allow a person not to be administered an opioid. The bill would also require health care licensing boards, such as nurses, physicians, and osteopaths to adopt regulations for licensure, renewal, and certification by regulation to make certain requirements of licensee's continued demonstration in pain management. It would also implement provisions to limit an initial prescription for an opioid to not more than a seven-day supply.

For pharmacists, the bill would require registration with the controlled substance prescription database regardless of whether the pharmacist has a federal drug enforcement administration registration number. Further, it would allow a person to request a pharmacist to dispense less than the prescribed amount of a schedule II or schedule III controlled substance. Among other items, it also would require that the controlled substance prescription database be updated daily rather than the current weekly update.

#### HCS SCR 2 (2d RLS) Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Awareness Month-Go Blue Day

Heard and amended in RLS 5/1.

Proclaims April 2018 as Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Child Abuse Awareness Month. Designates April 6, 2018 as Go Blue Day in observance of child abuse prevention.

Adds the following amendment offered by Eastman and supported by Eastman, Chenault, Reinbold and LeDoux

**WHEREAS** taking the life of an innocent preborn child through abortion is the ultimate form of child abuse, and, in 2016, according to the Department of Health and Social Services, the lives of at least 556 Alaska preborn children were taken through the State of Alaska medical assistance and Denali KidCare programs; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2016, 75 percent of the Alaska preborn children whose lives were taken through abortion whose mothers were 14 years of age or younger were taken through the Denali KidCare program;

## SENATE COMMITTEE OR FLOOR ACTION

[SB 103](#) / **Education Grants; Scholarship; Innovative Education Fund** <Passed Senate on 4/26>

Referred to H EDC, FIN on 5/3.

The current Alaska Performance Scholarships and the Alaska Education Grants will be phased out over the next four years. The Higher Education Fund will be renamed to The Alaska Innovation Education Grant Fund. The purpose is to provide school districts with grants to fulfill academically innovative ways of delivering education.

## COMMITTEE HEARINGS

Check the [Daily Schedule](#) after 5pm for the next day's hearings.

**~ End of Report ~**

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