

# 2020 CAPITOL CURRENTS

31<sup>st</sup> Alaska State Legislature ~ 2<sup>nd</sup> Session

**Tenth Edition**  
**March 29, 2020**

**More cases and Counting**  
**Congress appropriates \$2 Trillion for COVID-19**  
**Legislature Handled the Basics & Recessed**

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

Done for now. Both the Senate and House recessed for the foreseeable future. Senator Giessel said members would be given ample time and notice if/when it will be safe to reconvene.

The pause button was hit at day 68 of Session.

Committee work may continue, and they can reconvene anytime up until the 120<sup>th</sup> day (May 20). After that they will have to be called into a special session if they need to take up any business.

The Alaska Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the Recall Dunleavy case. The Division of Elections appealed the lower court decision that agreed with the Recall folks. The Justices followed state health mandates by restricting physical access to the courtroom and allowing the parties to join by phone.

On Gavel to Gavel, the three visible members seemed to be spaced at least 6 feet apart with others on the phone. Tough questions for both sides. No decision from the bench and they didn't give us a decision date.

### **COVID-19 News**

For the latest information on the COVID-19 outbreak in Alaska visit: [DHSS COVID-19 Website](#)  
Health mandates are listed here: [Health Mandates](#)

The President has extended the infamous Real ID October deadline. The new compliance deadline is October 1, 2021. Many communities, who have been waiting for mobile DMV service, are part of a health alert that discourages travel. Stay tuned.

State workers have had it. They said the Administration was requiring them to come to work unequipped with personal protection equipment (PPE) and in offices that don't practice proper social distancing.

The Union says they have tried over and over to work with The Governor. They finally decided to get a judge involved to break the logjam. Nonetheless, the Governor specifically exempted "public government services" workers from his latest stay at home mandate.

[SB 241](#) a comprehensive economic plan to mitigate the immediate impacts of COVID-19 on Alaska families and small businesses, made it through both bodies after intense negotiations in a free powers conference committee.

Usually conference committees can only work within the parameters of the differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill. Free powers are rarely given because anything goes—the legislation can be completely rewritten, if necessary.

The bill extends the Governor’s health disaster emergency until November 15. Takes \$10 million from the Disaster Relief Fund for response expenses and allows the Lt. Governor to order votes by mail if the crisis is still in play.

Out of state, quarantined Alaskans or those who are avoiding travel due to COVID-19 remain eligible for the PFD even if they’re gone for more than the 180 allowed days. The state may speed up the process of admitting qualified out of state health professionals.

It also addresses foreclosures, evictions and utilities. Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Anne Zink, is granted authority to issue standing orders for healthcare providers relating to COVID-19; and, provisions for telemedicine and telehealth are covered.

Click here for a fact sheet on the provisions of SB 241 from Sen. Coghill’s office: [Fact Sheet](#)

[HB 308](#) a COVID-19 impacts mitigator passed the Legislature Monday and the Governor signed it into law Thursday. Under HB 308, Alaskans who lost work due to the virus can apply for benefits. It includes folks who’re staying home to care for school age children and those who lost their jobs because of business shutdowns.

The bill also allows the state to receive unemployment insurance grants under the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act -- [FFCRA](#).

[HB 309](#) Confirmation of Appointment passed both bodies and temporarily extends the time for which the Legislature can meet in joint session to confirm the Governor’s cabinet appointments and appointments to state boards and commissions.

It allows for the confirmations to take place in a special session prior to January 18, 2021 or within 30 days of the expiration of the declaration of a public health disaster emergency issued by the Governor on March 11, 2020.

## **BUDGET ISSUES**

Before the recess, the Legislature approved \$4.5 billion for the FY 2021 operating and capital budgets. \$88 million for COVID-19 funding was included. Another \$680 million covers a \$1,000 dividend we’ll see next fall.

The hoped for April \$1,000 special dividend was pulled out of the bill in conference.

Budget items from the supplemental for FY 2020 that were not funded last week in [HB 234](#) were moved into the bill. This replenishes the funding for: shortfalls for Medicaid, forest fire costs, State Troopers, and earthquake-related repairs.

It also includes \$15 million for the COVID-19 response this year.

The Senate passed [HB 205](#) 19-1. The House Majority needed 30 votes to fully fund the budget using the Constitutional Budget Reserve (CBR). They had 29. After a long pause, Republican Rep. Sullivan Leonard cast the 30<sup>th</sup> vote.

Medicaid: the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act [FFCRA](#) included a 6.2% increase in the regular Medicaid matching rate. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released *Frequently Asked Questions* about these provisions on March 24 [Click here for FAQs on FFCRA](#).

[Click here to read the article "CMS Issues Guidance for States About New Increased Medicaid and CHIP Matching Rate" from State Health and Value Strategies.](#)

## **BILLS**

Senior win! The Legislature approved a fix to the Pioneer Home rate increase debacle. [HB 96](#) by Rep. Fields, reduces prices for the first four levels and allows the department to set “sufficient” monthly rates for the highest level of care, now \$15,000 per month. Governor next.

[SB 120](#) sponsored by Senator Giessel is heading to the Governor. It grants Advanced Practice Registered Nurses and Physician’s Assistants the authority to prescribe psychotropic medication, without consent, to court ordered patients during a crisis situation.

Concepts from [HB 290](#) were amended into the bill so it also establishes crisis stabilization centers to address unmet intermediate services during a behavioral or substance abuse emergency. Police officers also can take individuals to the center, as an alternative to arrest.

[SB 134](#) Medicaid Coverage of Licensed Professional Counselors, sponsored by Senator Wilson passed both bodies and is awaiting transmittal to the Governor.

[SB 137](#) Extend the Board of Parole, sponsored by Senator Micciche extends the Board through June 30, 2025. The bill awaits transmittal.

[SB 172](#) Extend the State Medical Board sponsored by Senator Olson extends the Board through June 30, 2023. The bill awaits transmittal.

Only 30 bills have passed both bodies to date. The only budget bill signed into law so far is HB 206, the Mental Health Budget Bill. Remember, all other budget bills have not yet been transmitted to Governor. More information regarding budget will be sent later.

### **Hearings for the week of March 30th:**

**LB&A meets at 9am on Monday** to discuss Special Audit Requests for the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and the Alaska State Commission on Human Rights. They will go into executive session to discuss final Audit Release: FY19 Statewide Single Audit. Other Committee Business is also on the schedule.

## **ITEMS OF INTEREST**

Rep. Tarr invites you to join the Virtual Go Blue Rally for child abuse prevention. Blue is the color of child abuse prevention and since we can’t rally in person we will rally online. Join online here: <https://www.facebook.com/events/530369224578671/>

**I’ll be monitoring Legislative movements and will send out reports as warranted. A final report will be available after the Session is officially adjourned.**

**~ End of Report ~**

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