

2020 CAPITOL CURRENTS

31st Alaska State Legislature ~ 2nd Session

Eighth Edition

3/14/2020

YIKES!

~ **Governor declares COVID-19 emergency calling it a slow moving storm.
First confirmed positive. Oil prices tumble.
We hold our breath ~**

HIGHLIGHTS

All three branches of government are taking steps to reduce the spread of COVID 19.



The Capitol Building just closed except for legislators, staff, members of the Administration and credentialed journalists. The people will have to rely on distance participation - gavel to gavel, AKL.tv, telephones, mail, email and teleconferences.

A temporary state travel ban is also in effect for legislators and employees. Protocols are in place for folks who have Capitol access and test positive or who have traveled out of state on personal business.

The Presiding Judge of the 3rd Judicial District has suspended new jury trials in Anchorage, Kenai and Palmer for the week of March 16th. Read about the Alaska Court System response to COVID19 here: [Alaska Court System Coved 19 Press Release](#)

Keep up-to-date on the Court's response at their homepage: [ACS Homepage](#)

The University of Alaska, Alaska Pacific University and Wayland Baptist University are moving toward online and web-conferencing classes. The University of Alaska is asking students who live on campus to stay or return home or find an alternative place to stay, if possible.

The University of Alaska statewide system has [set up a website](#) for updates on its response to the threat of COVID-19. APU and Wayland are keeping students/faculty updated through their main web pages [Alaska Pacific University](#) and [Wayland Notifications](#)

See the Executive Branch response under the *Governor's Corner* later in this report.

When it rains, it pours. The state instituted a hiring freeze and suspended all out of state travel for state workers. Chief of Staff Ben Stevens attributed these actions to the big drops in oil prices. This may seriously elevate Alaska's fiscal blues, if conditions out of our control persist.

In legislative news:

Rep. LeDoux and two associates have been charged with multiple counts of election misconduct in 2018 and 2014, according to charging documents filed Friday. The feds joined the investigation. They will be forwarded to a grand jury. The case involves asking at least two voters from other districts to vote in her district.

The bi-partisan Legislative Council heard the Initiative that would re-do the way we vote by requiring ranked choice voting, open primaries and contribution disclosures. Initiative sponsor, Alaskans for Better Elections, say they want to give non-partisan candidates and voters more power. Mixed reviews.

[HB 29](#) Insurance Coverage for Telehealth sponsored by Rep. Spohnholz passed both bodies and is awaiting transmittal to the Governor. The bill allows providers who contract with insurers regulated by the state of Alaska to reimburse for healthcare services, primarily mental health and primary care delivered through telehealth without a first in-person visit.

[SB 101](#) establishing March 12th as Ashley Johnson-Barr Day is also awaiting transmittal to the Governor. People across the state wore purple on Thursday in remembrance of Johnson-Barr.

Legislative tension is palpable as they struggle with bad economic news and significant health threats. They're aiming for a 90 day session, maybe sooner if need be. PFD questions looms large.

BUDGET ISSUES

In an unusual move, the budget amendment Governor Dunleavy submitted last week for the COVID-19 response was transferred to the Mental Health budget, which then passed both bodies of the Legislature on March 11th.

It's been transmitted to the Governor and he has until March 28th to act on it. Passage of [HB 206](#) also takes one thing off the end of session negotiating table.

As a reminder, the amendment provides the Division of Public Health with five new public health nurses, three nurse epidemiologists, one microbiologist in Fairbanks to assist with lab testing, and one emergency manager to assist in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

These positions will be based statewide and will travel as needed to help rural communities monitor and screen for COVID-19. Costs: \$4 million in state funds and \$9 million in federal.

Other items included in the mental health budget:

- \$400,000 GF/MH for suicide prevention grants that provide training, curriculum development, and evidence-based peer-to-peer and culturally relevant programming for schools statewide.
- \$372,700 GF/MH to match other funding for specialized support for defendants with behavioral health disorders and other disabilities in rural communities.
- \$290,000 GF/MH to support probation and specialized case management services for participants in the Palmer Family, Infant, and Toddler and Palmer Wellness therapeutic courts.
- \$63,000 GF/MH to match other funding to expand the state's ability to conduct health assessments via telehealth, including through the use of mobile and assistive technologies, for improving coordination and service delivery to people with disabilities.

- \$850,000 GF/MH to maintain the state’s portion of funding for grants to homeless shelters and other community organizations that provide homeless prevention services, emergency rental and utility assistance, rapid rehousing, and more to Alaskans who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness, HAP-Homeless Assistance Program.
- \$2 million GF/MH to maintain the state’s portion for housing assistance that includes vouchers and long-term rental support for Alaskans with special needs.

The bill also maintains current funding levels and fund sources for grants to community-based providers for outpatient and residential mental health and substance use disorder treatment services to low-income youth and adults with moderate to severe behavioral health disorders.

Budget Hearings for the week of March 16th

The Senate is working to closeout operating budget subcommittee work and the full Finance committee is taking testimony on [HB 205](#) the operating budget and [SB 154](#) the capital budget.

Senate FINSUB Meetings

Corrections	Monday	7:45am, Inmate Rehabilitation & Recidivism Reduction
	Thursday	8:30am, Closeout
LAW	Thursday	8:00am, Closeout
Public Safety	Thursday	1pm, Closeout
DEED	Thursday	1pm, Closeout
HSS	Friday	8am, Closeout

Senate Finance Public Testimony Schedule **Testimony will be via Telephone Only** **NO in-person testimony**

CALL-IN #

From Juneau or Anchorage dial 586-9085.

Outside Juneau or Anchorage dial 844-586-9085

Written testimony will be accepted at: finance.committee@akleg.gov

Wednesday 9am Sign-up by 10:15am

Juneau, Fairbanks, Unalaska, Nome Bethel, Kotzebue, Utqiagvik, Tok, Delta Junction

Wednesday 1pm Sign-up by 2:30pm

Anchorage, Mat-Su, Off-nets

Thursday 9am Sign-up by 10:15am

Ketchikan, Wrangell, Petersburg, Sitka, Kenai, Kodiak, Seward, Valdez, Homer, Cordova

Other Budget Hearings

[HJR 31](#) Constitutional Amen: Permanent Fund; POMV; Earnings, is expected to be heard and quickly moved from **HSTA** on **Tuesday at 3pm**. Pending referral it is also scheduled in **HJUD** at **1pm on Wednesday and Friday**.

[HB 190](#) PFD Allowable Absences is also scheduled for **HSTA** on **Tuesday at 1pm. Thursday at 1:30pm** **HFIN** takes up [HB 131](#) Appropriation Limit which impose structural controls to limit how much spending can increase year to year.

Also at **1:30pm**, **SL&C** is meeting and will hear [SB 215](#) AK Education Saving Programs/Eligibility sponsored by Sen. Giessel. **Public testimony will be taken.**

Friday at 1:30pm, **HFIN** will start work on their version of the Capital budget - [HB 207](#)

BILLS

[SB 167](#) Aggravating Factor: Correctional Officers sponsored by the Governor passed the Senate and was referred to STA and JUD in the House. The bill establishes an aggravator at sentencing, which the court may apply when a defendant is convicted of promoting contraband and the offense occurred in the course of the person's contractual, volunteer, or employment duties.

Hearings for the week of March 16th:

Monday 9am, **HFIN** will hear [HJR 15](#) Constitutional Amend: Votes Needed for Veto Override and [HB 181](#) Public Schools: Mental Health Education.

Also at **9am**, **SFIN** will hear [SB 134](#) Medicaid Coverage of Licensed Counselors **Public testimony will be taken.**

At 3:15pm **HL&C** meets for **public testimony** on [SB 52](#) Alcoholic Beverage control; Alcohol Regulations.

Tuesday at 8am, **House Tribal Affairs** will hear [HJR 29](#) Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945 **Public testimony will be taken.**

HHSS meets at **3pm** and will hear [HB 255](#) Food Stamps; Work Requirements; Time Limits.

[HB 142](#) Native Organizations TANF Program receives its first hearing in the Senate in **SSTA** at **3:30pm** **Public testimony will be taken.**

Also at **3:30pm**, **SSTA** meets and will hear [HB 83](#) Prohibit Voting by Facsimile.

Wednesday at 1:30pm, **SHSS** will hear [HB 133](#) Juveniles: Justice; Facilities; Treatment. This is the bill's first hearing in the Senate **Public testimony will be taken.**

Thursday at 3pm, **HHSS** will hear [HB 242](#) Prescription of Opioids; Database and [HB 184](#) Controlled Substances Data: Exempt Veterinarians **Public testimony will be taken on both bills.**

GOVERNOR'S CORNER

Governor Dunleavy issued a declaration of public health disaster emergency in response to the COVID-19 anticipated outbreak. [Click here](#) for a signed copy of the disaster declaration

Keep up-to-date on Health Alerts and other State of Alaska responses to Covid-19:
[State of Alaska Covid 19 Response](#)

Friday, March 13th, the Governor with the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) issued the State of Alaska’s first COVID-19 Health Mandate. The mandate suspends and limits general public visitation to the following state institutions until otherwise rescinded by DHSS and the

Office of the Governor:

Suspended Visitation

- Department of Corrections (DOC) Facilities
- Division of Juvenile Justice Facilities
- Alaska Military Youth Academy
- Alaska Psychiatric Institute

Limited Visitation

- Alaska Pioneer Homes

Additionally, public school days between March 16, 2020 and March 30, 2020 will be non-student contact days in which students will not be attending school and all after school activities will be suspended. A signed copy of the mandate can be [found here](#).

ITEMS OF INTEREST

HEDC and **SEDC** meet together **Monday at 8am** to hear a presentation on The State of Alaska K-12 Schools from the Alaska Council of School Administrators.

HCRA meets **Tuesday at 8am** to hear a presentation on Climate Change Action Plan & Policy Recommendations to the Governor by members of the Walker Administration’s Climate Change for Alaska Leadership Team.

Canceled - Tuesday at 11am the Legislature will hear U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan’s annual address.

Lunch and Learns

Thursday Fostering in Alaska: A Discussion with the Resource Family Advisory Board (RFAB)

Confirmation Hearings

Tuesday

1:30pm **SL&C** considers Dana Walukiewicz and Rex Leath for the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board

3pm **HHSS** considers Christopher Gay and Sarah Bigelow Hood for the State Medical Board

3:30pm **SSTA** considers Hardy Lawrence and Daniel LaSota for the Alaska Public Offices Commission

Wednesday

9am **HFIN** considers Anita Halterman and Rhonda Boyles for the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority

1pm **HJUD** considers Ed Mercer, Daniel Weatherly, Joseph White and Jennifer Winkelman for the Alaska Police Standards Council

1:30pm **SHSS** considers Anita Halterman and Rhonda Boyles for the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and Lydia Mielke for the State Medical Board

SJUD considers Richard “Kay” Payne and Gregory Bringhurst for the Violent Crimes Compensation Board

Thursday

9am

SEDC considers Cachet Garrett for the University of Alaska Board of Regents

1:30pm

SL&C considers Christopher Jaime, Bruce Schulte and Casey Dschaak for the Marijuana Control Board and Bethel Belisle for the Board of Certified Direct-Entry Midwives

3pm

HHSS considers Lydia Mielke for the State Medical Board

HSTA looks to be considering *all* of their Council/Board responsibilities in one afternoon! (*I really think they are listing them all on the calendar so they can brought up under Items previously heard/scheduled*)

They do not list the nominees but the groups include the State Commission for Human Rights; Alaska Public Offices Commission; State Board of Parole; Alaska Police Standard Council; Alcoholic Beverage Control Board; Board of Governors of the Alaska Bar; Commission on Judicial Conduct; Marijuana Control Board; Board of Marital & Family Therapy; State Medical Board; Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees; Board of Certified Direct-Entry Midwives; Board of Nursing; Board of Pharmacy; State Physical Therapy & Occupational Therapy Board; Board of Professional Counselors; Board of Psychologists & Psychological Assoc. Examiners; Board of Social Work Examiners; Violent Crimes Compensation Board; Professional Teaching Practices commission; Board of Regents University of Alaska; the Public Defender; and, the Commissioner of the Dept of Revenue

Friday

1pm

HJUD considers Gregory Bringhurst and Richard “Kay” Payne for the Violent Crimes Compensation Board

WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS

Website-Daily Committee Hearings for March 16-21, 2020

[Weekly Schedule](#)

Gavel to Gavel: Most committee hearings can be seen and heard on Gavel Alaska. It is broadcast on both local access TV and on the internet at [Gavel](#)

Streaming Video

[Live Now](#)

Testifying

Legislative Information Office (LIO) [LIO Offices](#)

In Juneau: see committee hearing list for room numbers

CALL-IN NUMBERS

- From Anchorage: 907-563-9085
- From Juneau: 907-586-9085
- From Anywhere Else: 844-586-9085

~ End of Report ~

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