

**ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH TRUST AUTHORITY  
FULL BOARD COMMITTEE MEETING  
January 31, 2024  
9:00 a.m.**

**Hybrid Meeting Originating at:  
Elizabeth Peratrovich Hall  
320 West Willoughby Avenue  
Juneau, Alaska**

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**Trustees Present:**

Anita Halterman, Chair  
Brent Fisher  
Kevin Fimon  
John Morris  
Rhonda Boyles

**Trust Staff Present:**

Steve Williams  
Katie Baldwin-Johnson  
Miri Smith-Coolidge  
Michael Baldwin  
Allison Biastock  
Kelda Barstad  
Valette Keller  
Carrie Predeger  
Debbie DeLong  
Heather Phelps  
Luke Lind  
Kat Roch

**Trust Land Office staff present:**

Jusdi Warner  
Jeff Green  
Sarah Morrison  
Blain Alfonso  
Chandler Long  
Heather Weatherall  
Karsten Eden  
Katie Vachris  
Tina Voelker-Ross  
Marisol Miller  
Pete Mueller

**Also participating:**

John Springsteen; Diane Fielden; Jeannie Monk; Kathy Craft; Marjie Hamburger; Charlene Tautfest; Steph Kings; Jennifer Motes; Jon Haghayeghi; Charity Lee; Stephanie Hopkins; Commissioner Kim Kovol; Deputy Commissioner Emily Ricci; Deputy Commissioner Clinton Lasley; Leah Van Kirk; Jorden Nigro; Max Blust.

## PROCEEDINGS

### CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR HALTERMAN called the Full Board meeting to order and began with a roll call. She stated that Trustee Sturgeon would be joining for the Resource Committee, but was excused from the rest of the meeting. She asked CEO Williams for an overview of the meeting.

CEO WILLIAMS went through the logistics.

### APPROVAL OF AGENDA

CHAIR HALTERMAN entertained a motion for the agenda, and requested any changes before approval.

**MOTION:** A motion to approve the agenda was made by TRUSTEE MORAN; seconded by TRUSTEE MORRIS.

*There being no objection, the MOTION was APPROVED*

### REVIEW OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES

CHAIR HALTERMAN moved to the Guiding Principles in the packet and asked for any questions. There being none, she continued to ethics disclosures.

### ETHICS DISCLOSURES

CHAIR HALTERMAN asked if there were any ethics disclosures. There being none, she moved to approval of minutes of November 15, 2023, and entertained a motion to approve them.

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

**MOTION:** A motion to approved the minutes from the November 15, 2023, meeting was made by TRUSTEE MORAN; seconded by TRUSTEE FISHER.

*There being no objection, the MOTION was APPROVED.*

CHAIR HALTERMAN stated that the current bylaws were included in the packet as a reference for trustees and the public.

### MISSION MOMENT

CHAIR HALTERMAN moved to the Mission Moment, and asked Eric Boyer to introduce the next presentation.

MR. BOYER stated that it was his pleasure to introduce Max and Jorden. Jorden is the Director of the Zach Gordon Shelter and Activities Center, which is located about a half a block from where this meeting was taking place. He continued that several staff members were able to attend a site visit yesterday and got to meet Max. He added that it was a pleasure to have them here to represent that organization, and to talk about the work they do with Trust beneficiaries. He continued that it is an organization that the Trust has supported with resources in the past.

MS. NIGRO began with an overview of Zach Gordon and all of their programs. They recently opened some housing programs; so, things are a bit different than they have been in the past. She continued that there is a drop-in center across the parking lot, and she invited all to stop by.

The center opens at 11:00, but there is always someone there in the morning, and would be happy to show everybody around. She added that their busiest hours are after school, and they regularly have between 30 and 50 kids then. She explained that Zach Gordon has existed as a drop-in center for over 75 years, and it was originally a teen center started by Zach Gordon. The Friends of Zach Gordon still exist, and they were the original board for the Center when it was a nonprofit. They own the building, and all of the staff are city employees. She continued that they serve a lot of kids, and serve a ton of meals every day. At 6:00 at night it is turned back into a teen center, and the kids look forward to turning 14 so they can stay after 6:00. During the week, they close at 9:00, and at 10:00 on Friday and Saturday. She talked about the shelter, which has a four-bedroom apartment that is used for transitional living for 18- to 21-year-olds, and the shelter holds 10 to 17 people. They also do a rapid rehousing program in the community for 18- to 24-year-olds where they help young people get into apartments and keep them. She continued that all of the housing side of the programs, the shelter, the transitional living, and the rapid rehousing are partnerships with Tlingit Haida Regional Housing Authority, which has made this whole effort possible. The grant for rapid rehousing was a HUD grant that went through the housing authority. HUD sends the checks to the landlords and the rentals. The supported services to the youth and the building itself at Sheiyi Xaat Hit provide the property management. She added that everything they do is partnership-based. She introduced Max who is one of the staff members who grew up in Juneau.

MR. BLUST stated that he grew up and spent his entire childhood in Juneau, except for one year when he was an exchange student in Hungary. He graduated from JDHS in 2015, and from Portland State in 2020. After 2020, his life got very complicated with the pandemic and declining mental health. He continued that he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder two years ago, and has been experiencing symptoms his entire adult life. A way for him to move forward and cope is to write about it. He needed music behind it, and he turned to writing songs. The songs in his life have been about everything from things being terrible and not wanting to go on, to things getting better and being thankful for the role in his community, his family, friends and society as a whole playing in his recovery in Juneau. He added that the biggest things are the community, his family and friends, having access to quality and efficient mental health services, medication, psychiatrists and therapy. The biggest thing he found in the Zach and being back in the Juneau community is that the community itself is important in that the society you live in dictates how you feel about yourself. He stated that he is happy and very content at the Zach because those around him know who he is and know about his condition. He gets to go through his job without fear of stigma, without fear of discrimination, or being looked down upon because of his bipolar disorder. The first song he wrote down on paper was “The 988 Song” and he played it for the Alaska Suicide Prevention Conference last year in May in Anchorage, which was an amazing experience. He explained that the song was about the crisis line and him thinking about it and how it impacted him, and just knowing that there is someone out there thinking about you, and even though you cannot always see them, there are people working behind the scenes to provide resources, which is what the Trust does.

(Max Blust sang “The 988 Song.”)  
(Applause)

MR. BLUST continued that he wrote that song after he had been discharged from a psyche ward in Portland earlier in the year and was looking for anything to be hopeful about. Going forward, he began writing songs about his life and how far he had come and the different barriers he had

to overcome. It was all confusing because none of it really made any sense. He introduced his next song which was “Still Alive.”

(Max Blust sang “Still Alive.”)  
(Applause)

MR. BLUST then continued that he was well into his recovery and had his own housing, a full-time job, and living back in the community where he grew up. He was beyond grateful for all of these things, and added that it would not have been possible without the people around him. He explained that the next song, “The Moment,” was just written, and he hoped that all would make the connection to this Mission Moment. This song celebrates the people who made his recovery possible.

(Max Blust sang “The Moment.”)  
(Applause)

MR. BLUST thanked all, and stated that he did not expect anything that happened to him in his mental-health journey. He did not expect to be living back at home with his parents, and he thanked his dad for coming. He continued that they had supported him through the whole things, as well as the community and the society here in Alaska. He thought recovery was impossible, and he tries not to worry too much about the future because he does not know what will happen next. He thanked everyone.

(Applause)

CHAIR HALTERMAN thanked Max and Jorden for the Mission Moment. She thanked Max for taking the time to tell his story. Music is therapeutic, and he found a way to heal and help others; and those sounds were amazing. She added that she is positive that he is making a difference in people’s lives, and she thanked him for what he does. She also thanked his family and the support in the community. She asked for any comments or questions from the trustees.

TRUSTEE BOYLES thanked them both, and stated that it was awesome.

CHAIR HALTERMAN recognized Ms. Baldwin-Johnson, and asked her to introduce the next speaker.

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH/DEPARMENT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

MS. BALDWIN-JOHNSON introduced Commissioner Hedberg from the Department of Health, and Commissioner Koval from the Department of Family and Community Services.

COMMISSIONER HEDBERG stated that with her today was Deputy Commissioner Emily Ricci, and her policy adviser, Leah Van Kirk.

COMMISSIONER KOVAL stated that she had Deputy Commissioner Lasley with her, as well.

COMMISSIONER HEDBERG stated, on behalf of both departments, that they wanted to pause, reflect, and really appreciate Max and the Mission Moment. His songs were heartfelt, and he said that there was a lot of work that happens behind the scenes that not everyone is aware of. It

was a perfect Mission Moment, and she appreciated spending their time together with Max. She then talked about the reorganization that created both departments on July 1<sup>st</sup>, and they are thankful for the smaller departments. She talked about some updates on plans, beginning with the Youth Behavioral Health Roadmap, which was an eight-month journey. It was five regions, very time-intensive, and we are still reflecting back on everything that was heard. With contractual support, a 113-page document was created that is rich with information and feedback. She continued that the foundation was around data-sharing, looking at the data-driven informed decisions and metrics to know if the system is working, including navigation and care coordination that really supports crisis services, outpatient services, inpatient services and stepdown services. This Youth Behavioral Health Roadmap was a listening session, and it was a catalyst that brought a lot of people together. Many legislators across the state participated, which really elevated the youth mental health crisis and identifying the gaps. The statewide steering committee had reflected on the document and gave some good feedback. Some of the gaps identified was the need to get out to rural communities to hear their perspectives. The departments are both committed to that process. She added that it is not all figured out yet, and we will continue to update on that process, which tags into the next document, the Comp Plan. She continued that the Youth Behavioral Health Roadmap is focused on the youth, and the Comp Plan is focused on all Alaskans. State agencies we have partnered with and are working closely with are the Department of Corrections, Department of Education, Public Safety and Admin. It is really coming together with a lot of synergy and energy. There are multi-disciplinary teams that looked at the nine core areas, and broke one of those core topic areas in two; so, there are now ten. The objectives and strategies were updated, and we are now refining that draft before it is sent through an initial public comment. She shared that the Youth Behavioral Health Roadmap is near a more finalized draft, but we do not have exact dates on when it will go to public comment. We will continue updating the trustees on that process. She continued into childcare. The Department of Health has four major arcs of effort. The behavioral health and complex care are two major arcs of effort. The third is around childcare. She explained that last year the Governor issued an Administrative Order creating a task force which represents different types of childcare providers. Every meeting was open to the public, was very intentional, and reflected that Alaskans are looking for solutions to address the lack of access to quality childcare. She added that there were two reports that focus on background checks, licensing, and workforce; and 33 recommendations were made to the Governor. Some of those recommendations have already been implemented. The Governor is still evaluating the recommendations, and we look forward to how those will be implemented. The second plan focuses on access, quality and subsidies. She stated that they will be happy to share the first report with the 33 recommendations, and she welcomed all to participate in the task force meetings. The Legislature appropriated \$7.5 million for workforce stabilization through an organization called Thread. They reached out to all licensed childcare providers to apply for the ROOTS awards which will be going out in February. The remaining arc of funding that the childcare program office received was \$14 million for innovation grants. The remaining arc of funding, which is another \$14 million, will go out to all childcare facilities through an application process, which she described. She added that childcare facilities could use it to subsidize some of the parent rates, or to purchase equipment.

TRUSTEE MORAN stated that using ARPA funding is one-time funding. She asked if there were any plans to continue this type of work, or are you looking at the successes and trying to have funding for that.

COMMISSIONER HEDBERG replied that there is a lot of Federal funding sent out to childcare

providers, and she thought that it was concurrent planning, understanding how those funds are used and with the feedback from the childcare facilities or employees. She noted that is also the work of the task force. She moved to her last update. She wanted the trustees to be aware of a term coined called “transformation of care.” CMS has new waivers, and are encouraging states to apply for those. They are around health-related social needs. CMS focuses on housing supports, nutrition or food as medicine, and care coordination for those two areas. There is another waiver around the incarcerated population that helps the individual as they leave the incarcerated setting, going back into the community, to help reduce that individual’s recidivism. She continued that they are in the first stage of exploring, and are looking at how other states have implemented those waivers. There is no finalized decision on what this will look like, but there is a lot of encouragement and further exploration for this. She added that they will be happy to provide the updates as they continue exploring these different conversations around the transformation of care.

CHAIR HALTERMAN asked if there is an opportunity within the prison system to address some of the substance abuse treatment needs while the person is incarcerated. She asked if these waivers gave some latitude to allow certain folks in that setting, especially for substance-abuse treatment.

MS. VAN KIRK talked about the option 1115 reentry waiver and stated that there are some flexibilities around how long intervention can be started when incarcerated. She continued that there are some minimum requirements for a reentry waiver, but states can expand on that. For instance, the minimum is case management 30 days prior to release, and states have the option to increase that up to 90 days. She added that they are exploring that and thinking about the best practices when engaging with someone.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RICCI added that this waiver focuses on reentry services for individuals that are anticipated to be Medicaid-eligible when leaving incarceration. There are specific prohibitions that states are not leveraging the Medicaid program to cover healthcare costs for individuals with extended periods of incarcerations. The focus on reentry is important to understand in the context of what the purpose of the waiver is about.

CHAIR HALTERMAN commented on her experiences while working within the women’s program in the Midwest, and she thanked them for their candid answers. She recognized Commissioner Kovol.

COMMISSIONER KOVOL stated that she would touch on some areas in the Department of Family & Community Services. They have four divisions, all direct services, custodial care; and one of the first things tackled was workforce. The vast majority of staff are direct services and are on morning, evening and third shifts. They operate 24/7, which is one of their priorities. They are the only department working on a pilot program called the Talent Acquisition Team; a new recruitment process that they instituted, with some really great results, including reducing the referral-to-approval process from 34 days down to 10 days. There is more fluidity with staffing supervisors working with this team all the way to onboarding. She talked about their first job fair and stated that it was exciting to see three divisions get together, interviewing, and hiring the person who accepted. The workforce transition is going in the right direction, but it is still a challenge. The hope is that it will demonstrate some great best practices and be a model for other folks to try. We are focused on OCS, because we do not have the bandwidth to do all four divisions. A new division will be added as we move forward. She stated that they had 35

student practical placements in their department from 11 different colleges and universities from Alaska and the Lower 48. They range from pharmacy students, doctoral, clinical, BSW, MSW, public health and nursing -- 35 potential new hires. She spoke about technology, and the implementation of a lot of smaller projects.

TRUSTEE BOYLES asked about the new technology acquisition and how it was being funded.

COMMISSIONER KOVOL replied that this was within their established budget.

CHAIR HALTERMAN asked if there was still an increased Federal reimbursement for the systems work that the Departments were undertaking. She continued that her other question was about foster care and the new interest in it: are there enough foster families, and whether certain regions are still short.

COMMISSIONER KOVOL replied that there will never be enough foster families. One of the terms they are moving towards is “resource families.” There are many different families that want to play different roles in the lives of the children in need. There are kinship families that do not want to be licensed, and families that understand that the No. 1 priority is reunification as much as possible. When that cannot happen, we go a different route. The family has to be ready. There is a lot of education and terminology done with staff, and with the communities and partners. There are just over 1200 foster families, which is going in the right direction. There was a massive drop at COVID, and it is building back up slowly. There is a struggle with having Alaskan Native foster families versus non-Native foster families. There are more youth in foster care that are Alaska Native; but it is the opposite percentage in the number of foster homes for Alaska Native children.

CHAIR HALTERMAN asked about the major barrier to the tribal populations wanting to become foster families.

COMMISSIONER KOVAL replied that there are a variety of answers to that. A big piece are the finances of taking on another child. Background checks could also be an issue for licensing. Placing children through the tribes is part of the process. This is not a one-person OCS decision; it is a team decision along, with the tribes. She stated that there is also the challenge of if the family is getting involved because of the close ties with the families.

CHAIR HALTERMAN stated appreciation for the candid answer.

TRUSTEE FIMON asked if they were finding some congruence with the tribal network, if all were coming together where all want the same thing.

COMMISSIONER KOVAL replied that they are seeing a lot of synergy with the tribal partners. They have 20 tribes signed on, but they represent 170 of the tribes. There is momentum. She stated that the challenge is that geography plays a part in this. Second, the OCS is a responsive agency. Through the Tribal Compact there are funds put forward for prevention work, but we would like to see more prevention efforts. The funding mechanism and the workforce mechanism are both challenges. She moved on and addressed the Complex Care Unit, which is a really important arc of effort, and one of the first things she talked about when she was brought on to this job. Dr. Oswald is at the helm and works closely with API. There are two program coordinators in place; one based in Fairbanks, and the other based in Anchorage. They do cover

the whole state. They are also hiring two support staff now because the caseloads are growing. She talked about the transitional youth pilot program which focuses on youth discharging from API. This is a budget request for fiscal year '25. The goal was to start small. It will involve home-like settings with wraparound services with staff available for the youth. This will help with transition for the year as they go back to their community. This is one of the priorities. She asked DC Lasley to talk about some of the divisions.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LASLEY talked about some of the divisions and some of the work they are doing. He stated that all are aware of the challenges that API has had over the years. They are very proud of the work that they have done over the past few years. Last year they had, on average, a daily census of about 62 of an 80-bed facility. That was upped to 73. A huge change was made there. One of the challenges was finding appropriate levels of care for discharging. The Chilkat Unit, the youth unit, is a 10-bed unit, and the census has been capped at six. These are really complex youth, which is why a focus with the complex care team was put on those efforts and how to find stepdown placement for those youth so that they will find success back in the community and not end up back in API. He then spent some time talking about the community- and jail-based restoration program, which is also a big focus. He was pleased to announce that the program launched and was funded with the support from the Trust. This program provides up to 10 seats for individuals that had been found incompetent to stand trial to make sure that they can go through the program, understand the core process as of their hearing, and participate in their trial. They also do the outpatient restoration program that also provides 10 seats. He stated that API received the 2023 Beacon Award from Alaska Hospital and Healthcare Association, which identifies facilities doing innovative things to serve individuals.

TRUSTEE FIMON stated that it was good to hear about the positive momentum at API after some of the lows a few years ago. He asked what the Trust could do to keep the momentum going.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LASLEY replied that it comes from a focus from the Administration, and the dedication of the Trust and trustees. It brought on staff and changed the way of thinking at the hospital. It is a restorative hospital, and we are there to serve individuals while in crisis, and to try to bring them back to their community. This took a shift in thinking and being willing to think outside of the box. He asked for continuing support. Staffing in the state of Alaska is always a challenge, and finding ways to increase that will help and support API. He continued that they offer tours, and he encouraged the public to come in to see and understand the program and process.

TRUSTEE MORRIS complimented the work that the Deputy Commissioner and his colleagues have done at API. His colleagues at Alaska Regional had an opportunity to visit the facility, and they were very impressed. They commented about how it was much easier to refer patients who are in need than it had been in the past. He thinks that the word is getting out among a lot of stakeholders, and not just in Juneau.

CHAIR HALTERMAN thanked Deputy Commissioner Lasley for the report, and the acknowledgment that the staff are safe within API. If staff are safer, the beneficiaries are safer. That is a positive sign, and it was clear that some positive change was introduced into that setting.



CEO WILLIAMS commented on the leaps forward from where API was in terms of being able to meet the needs of folks in a behavioral health crisis five years ago. API itself was in a crisis five years ago. A number of things have happened since, and one was the focus of Departments, this leadership and other leadership, on trying to get at the root of what was going on to ensure that staff were safe. He continued, that translated in high quality care, safe individuals, and a community that trusts and understands the role and importance of that level of care for someone in a behavioral health crisis. His point was that they are working to really make communities and provider systems have the capacity and high-quality treatment available to intervene earlier. Regarding workforce, the trustees had approved funding for SHARP, and he asked for an update on that and how it has played into building workforce within API and the types of positions that were provided.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LASLEY replied that the Trust had supported API with some funding for the SHARP program. That funding is being utilized to currently look at those highest, hard-to-fill positions, the psychiatrists' and psychologists' positions. They are also looking into expanding some of the nursing positions. He has asked for a report, and will make sure that whenever the Trust provides funding that is intended to be one-time or short-term funding, to come up with the mechanisms to ensure that is ongoing work within the hospital. He asked for the hospital to give him a cost analysis. He stated appreciation for the funding.

CHAIR HALTERMAN stated that there is a Nursing Compact opportunity and asked if that would help API if that legislation passed and allowed nurses to cross borders to serve in Alaska.

COMMISSIONER KOVAL replied that it will not just help API, but will also solve it for APH, OCS, DJJ. It affects all of the Divisions. She talked about how they build their messaging looking at two things: First, the community ambassadors are built. The trustees are community ambassadors, as well as the families. They also look at how they story-tell with the recruitment process and are developing a new way of doing this. They will be talking about the relationships that staff have with the clients, and also asked the residents to talk about their experiences with the staff; not the API clients because of HIPAA. She added that they are looking at it from many angles that refer to how the improvements are being messaged and sustained.

CHAIR HALTERMAN thanked the panelists from the Department and added that in order to improve the system they had to think outside the box. She stated appreciation for all the work they do, and for making time to bring the issues to the Trust. She called a break.

(Break.)

CHAIR HALTERMAN called the meeting back to order, and asked Ms. Baldwin-Johnson to introduce the statutory advisors.

#### **STATUTORY ADVISOR UPDATE**

MS. BALDWIN-JOHNSON stated that in the room were Patrick Reinhart, executive director of the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education; Stephanie Hopkins, the acting executive director for the Alaska Mental Health Board, the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, and the State Suicide Prevention Council. She continued that on the phone was Jon Haghayeghi, executive director on the Alaska Commission on Aging. She asked Mr. Reinhart to begin.

## **GOVERNOR’S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION**

MR. REINHART introduced himself and began his presentation for the winter Trust meeting. His theme was adaptive skiing and sports, and he shared the story of his start in the disability advocacy world as a disabled ski racer for Challenge Alaska, and then as the Director of Challenge Alaska. He addressed a few budgetary issues for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the Council’s priorities for the 2024 legislative session. He added they were still working on their drafts. He then mentioned the Early Intervention Infant Learning Program budget within the Department of Health, Senior and Disability Services, which they always keep track of. This program of prevention is so important for children with developmental disabilities at a young age. The sooner they are identified and get involved in services, the better off they will be in their young adult life. This is found to be true across the board.

TRUSTEE MORAN asked that since a lot of these kids did not get services during COVID, were they seeing higher incidences.

MR. REINHART replied that it was back to normal compared to when it went down during COVID. One of the biggest issues being faced is hiring a contractor. They are looking at the opportunity to lower the threshold on developmental delays. There is a contractor working with the program involved in that with the Interagency Coordinating Council to see what lowering the percentage of delay would do in terms of the pressure on the program financially; how much that would cost. The sooner getting the smaller kids involved in programs and services, the better off they will be. The more invested at this level, the less it will cost the State and their families in the future. He moved to the budget which was quite a bit lower than it had been in the past. They are getting back to what is normal for them, and have given money back to the Trust when some of the funding was not used. The Council has been in a situation where it had been very fortunate to have very large Federal grants on top of the grant received as a developmental disabilities’ council. He talked about the situation and the shortfall when the grant ends September 30, 2024, and the need in the Governor’s budget to make their budget whole. He stated that they have a full staff. There is a current vacancy which will be left vacant for a while. He continued through the budget and the community and public transportation, and then the need for home modifications and upgrades.

A brief discussion on Senior and Disability Services ensued.

He thanked the Trust for including one of his staff to go to the Housing First conference in March. They will be looking at what the Council can do for their beneficiary group in terms of housing and home mods. He stated that the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Bill of Rights is legislation that came out of the Special Education Advisory Panel and the Deaf Education Board last year. It was rolled into SB 140 on the House side. He continued through the issues, explaining as he went through. He then went through news and events that were coming up. He invited the trustees to the awards ceremony at the Special Ed conference in February. There was also an Inclusive Practice Awards breakfast where they honor a teacher, a special education assistant, and a program in special education and distribute some awards. This year they are all coming from very rural sites. The Council meeting is February 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>. There is an opportunity to do a social event at the Governor’s house with the Lieutenant Governor on the 15<sup>th</sup>. They also requested an opportunity to present some of these ideas to the House Health and Social Services Committee, also on the 15<sup>th</sup>. The Key Campaign is February 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>. There will be a smaller group, and the Council does support and provides funding for people that

participate in that. The National Disability Policy Seminar is April 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>. This is where they get all the national issues impacting people with intellectual developmental disabilities, send teams to congressional delegations' offices, and do advocacy around that and education. The Full Lives Conference is April 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, and he invited Max Blust to come to that to present. With the Supported Decision-Making Workgroup and activities, he thanked the Trust for the support of a contractor to keep that going. The founder of Project SEARCH Employment Training and Program will be coming in March. They will go around the state at three different sites and do a technical assistance trip with her. He invited any of the trustees to join them for one of those. It is quite an educational experience with these kids learning really good job skills. He moved to the Alaska ABLE account update and stated it has really grown since this started. They have the support of the Department of Revenue in this, and the Treasurer's office. The Council does a lot of the education.

CHAIR HALTERMAN thanked Mr. Reinhart and looked forward to hearing about the rate-setting impact on the home improvements for those providers; and especially when talking about home modifications. She also looked forward to seeing where the Departments go with the rate-setting review and where Senior and Disability Services would go with recruiting the home modification providers to get back to doing business with the State of Alaska.

TRUSTEE FIMON thanked Mr. Reinhart and stated appreciation for all the information provided. He thanked him for his 40 years. He enjoyed the presentations, and getting to know him over the last two years.

CHAIR HALTERMAN recognized Stephanie Hopkins.

#### **ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD/ADVISORY BOARD ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE**

MS. HOPKINS stated that she is the acting executive director of the Alaska Mental Health Board, the Advisory Board on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, and the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council. She welcomed Chair Halterman and the trustees to Juneau, and apologized for the rain. She introduced Charity Lee, the Health and Social Services Planner II, to kick off with some updates about what they had been doing with the boards lately.

MS. LEE explained that the boards had been engaged in a thorough strategic planning process where they were evaluating their governing statutes: looking at historical work; current work; seeing how they were fulfilling their roles and responsibilities; where they had seen greater efficacy in the past, et cetera. She continued that the 2024 action plan is a direct product of this work, and it was recently approved at their January board meeting. A huge component of the strategic planning process that went into this action plan was a survey-type work done with board members going through the statutes, the areas identifying as high priority and areas identified as needing improvement and utilizing them. This was translated, evaluated qualitatively and quantitatively, pulling out the top areas and thematically analyzing open-ended questions, and then concluded as the board priorities for the year. The intention behind all this work was to develop a five-year improvement plan for the boards. She went through the identified board priorities for this year which were evaluation, consumer engagement, and empathy and understanding, which they call their three Es: evaluation, engagement and empathy. She went through the goal statement for these areas, beginning with evaluation. The boards have a statutory role in evaluating state-funded behavioral health services. The survey with board members consistently identified evaluation as the No. 1 area of needed improvement. It is a

primary focus for the board work going forward. The goal statement for evaluation is Alaska's behavioral health services are routinely evaluated for efficacy through a comprehensive process, which includes input from persons with lived experience; and the last component is reflected in the activities they do to ensure the how they evaluate behavioral health services. The behavioral health continuum of care in Alaska is informed by the people accessing these services. She went through some of the activities within this area which include increasing the engagement with the mental health block grant in the substance use prevention, treatment and recovery services, SUPTRS, and improving public comment and the analysis and use of that public comment. Also making sure that public comment is accessible, advertised and utilized to inform the block grant. She continued through a number of other activities. Some were hosting listening sessions on main topics that providers want more information on and continue to inform services. The overall statement for empathy and understanding is: All Alaskans are provided with dignity and respect and are viewed as valued members of their families and communities. Some activities include behavioral health awareness campaigns; developing guidelines and toolkits. She concluded her brief summation of the 2024 action plan.

MS. HOPKINS thanked Ms. Lee and moved to a brief overview of the legislative priorities. She stated that two years ago they had three full-time people working on the advocacy work, and this year she is the only one. The work has scaled down quite a bit, but we are still keeping a major list of every bill and budget item that impacts their population and Trust beneficiaries. Currently, they are working on just three bills. She added that all the information is available on the Friday 12:15 p.m. calls. HB 119 will change the tax structure on cannabis products, in part to decrease the tax burden on cannabis cultivators and to possibly preempt Federal legalization if there was a product that was grown outside of Alaska. It would not be taxed in Alaska based on the current tax structure. The boards are concerned and interested on the impacts that will have on the programs funded by the Marijuana Education and Treatment Fund. She stated that funding money goes to the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault; to the Department of Corrections for domestic violence and reentry programming. The next bill is SB 89, and it is a companion to HB 176. She explained that this will put Alaska into compliance with the Federal tobacco age of 21. She continued that the rule for the same tobacco age was tied to the Synar amendment which impacts the ability to receive mental health and substance use, SUPTRS, block grant money. As long as Alaska continues to stay out of compliance, the ability to fund these programs is in jeopardy. She stated that the next bill was SB 103, and its companion, HB 15. This would create an infrastructure for peer support counseling within the Department of Corrections and law enforcement agencies within the state. It also would create a confidentiality provision for people receiving peer support through that system. The Senate version of that bill had passed over to the House, and it is likely to see some movement on that going forward.

CHAIR HALTERMAN asked what caused the Governor's Office to veto it and keep it from being passed, and if that was removed from the current version of the bill.

MS. HOPKINS replied that the reason given for the veto was the tax added to the cigarettes. The Governor said he was not interested in a new tax at that time. She invited all to the Advocacy Committee meeting every Monday at noon, available on the same Zoom link. She also shared her email at [advocacy.coordinator@alaska.gov](mailto:advocacy.coordinator@alaska.gov). They are open to the public. She stated that the Joint Advocacy teleconference is every Friday. They have all the bills and budget items that impact Trust beneficiaries that they go through weekly. Signing up for that network gives access to the assorted master spreadsheets that have all the bills and budget items they track, and also that had moved that week. It also gives the meeting schedule every week and action alerts

coming forward. She also added the info sheets that the Trust has for the Joint Advocacy Network legislative priorities for the year. She then talked about what happened and what could be improved on the perception of what had happened recently. The boards went through a lot of Open Meetings Act stuff last year and had a lot of time with the Department of Law. Something that was brought up many times in that Open Meetings education was keeping in mind that there are beneficiaries that were following along. The Trust puts a lot of time and effort into making sure that beneficiaries can follow along with their processes. When the Trust is doing the governance decisions, she reminded the Board that when people are volunteers or are not paid, to pay attention to things like reiterating the motions and making sure that the public is aware of the steps that have to be taken to notify the person that is the subject of an Executive Session. One notification is that the public notice and Executive Session could be done in the public session if the person so chooses. She explained that they had to redo actions because they were not clear that the person could have the hearing in public. Also suggested was putting time limits on their agenda. A set time indicates to the public that only that one item would be talked about, and not skewing away from the motion that was passed there. She pitched the Department of Commerce that has a fantastic website on the Open Meetings Act. It is more of a resource than the Boards and Commissions Open Meetings Act documents. There are tabs, resources, and suggested motions there. She invited the trustees to the Advocacy Committee on Mondays at noon, February 5<sup>th</sup>; presentation from Origin on February 26<sup>th</sup>. She explained that Origin does the infrastructure for the technology that goes into tablets to the Department of Corrections should a bill be introduced and passed that would allow that. There is also an Advocacy Committee that meets every second Monday at 10:00 o'clock. She also invited all to their next full board meeting in Wasilla at the Mat-Su Resort on April 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup>, with a public comment at the public library on the 17<sup>th</sup>. She stated that any participation or promotion for that is appreciated. She added that she was excited about going to their next meeting in Ketchikan. She also asked for any specific requests about data. They have a data guru who is fantastic and can help get some information about the people served and the programs being looked at.

CHAIR HALTERMAN asked for any questions or comments from the trustees. There being none, she thanked Ms. Hopkins and Ms. Lee for their presentation, and recognized Mr. Hagheyeghi.

#### **ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING**

MR. HAGHAYEGHI thanked the Trust for their continued support of ACoA, for both the special projects and the critical PCN. In past presentations they had been focused on the State Plan, talking about demographics, looking at surveys. Today he wanted to talk about the critical role that the Commission on Aging takes towards senior issues as an advocacy group; a very informative discussion. He continued that the critical support services that underpin the independence and well-being of the senior citizens having to do more with less. For that reason, funding continues to be a high priority for the Commission. He moved to the critical issues of housing in Alaska and addressed the scarcity of affordable homes. This shortage led to long waitlists and, in some cases, seniors living in substandard conditions. The Senior Citizens' Housing Development Fund has been instrumental in providing over 1000 senior housing units through programs like the Greater Opportunities for Affordable Living, GOAL, and the Senior Access Program. He stated that the Commission on Aging is a big proponent of increasing funding for senior housing because it directly affects seniors across the state, and the stark reality is the need to increase capacity by at least 320 units annually to keep pace with the growth of the senior population. He continued to the importance of the senior benefits program and the State-funded initiative in Alaska that provides essentially financial assistance to low-income seniors

that are 65 and older. He added that Senate bills 170 and 172 extend the senior benefits program. The program is crucial in helping seniors meet basic living expenses such as food, heating and healthcare costs. Eligibility is based on gross annual income, with different tiers offering varying monthly payments. He stated that the Nurse Licensure Compact Bill, Senate Bill 130, presents a solution to the nursing shortage being experienced in Alaska. This bill will facilitate the practice of nursing in Alaska by nurses licensed in other Compact states; significantly increasing the ability to fill vacancies. He talked about enhancing senior mobility and stated that transportation is also on the priority list. He explained that Senate Bill 189 will extend the Commission on Aging sunset to June 30, 2032. The audit is complete, and the findings were published in December. Copies are available on the Legislative Website. He thanked everyone for their time, and hoped that the presentation was useful to the Trust. Coming up in the near future, the annual report will be on the Website and the Senior Snapshot should also be online next week. The February meeting is scheduled for the 21st of February. He thanked all for their time.

TRUSTEE BOYLES thanked him for his presentation and asked if there was anything specifically going on for the dementia population.

MR. HAGHEYEGHI replied that it had not been the focus of recent discussions, but will be a big focus area during the February meeting. There is a huge area of overlap for the Trust and the Commission, and we will do proper due diligence in that regard.

CEO WILLIAMS thanked Mr. Hagheyeghi for the presentation and wanted to clarify that the census data in there was the senior population as a whole; and seniors that have ADRD are Trust beneficiaries.

MR. HAGHEYEGHI clarified that it is the population 60 and older by census area.

CHAIR HALTERMAN stated that they would recess, break for lunch, and start assembling at the Capitol at 1:10.

(Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Board of Trustees meeting recessed at 12:04 p.m.)

