

Senator Gray-Jackson's Notes
Spenard Community Council
February 7, 2024

Education

The Alaska State Legislature has been working on increasing the Base Student Allocation (BSA) for this year. The proposed legislation, Senate Bill 140, includes a smaller public education funding boost than advocates requested. The bill proposes a permanent \$300 increase to the BSA, which is a 5% increase but less than what school districts have said is needed to keep up with inflation. However, the Association of Alaska School Boards has recommended a permanent \$1,413 increase, and some lawmakers have called for a permanent increase of \$680. The legislature's work on this issue indicates ongoing discussions and potential changes regarding education funding in the state.

This Session

The following is a list of my current legislative priorities for this session.

Juneteenth (SB 22) — Make Juneteenth an observed legal state holiday. This bill was heard and held in House Finance Committee on February 6th with a deadline of February 13th for amendments. The bill will head to the Rules Committee then to the House Floor for a vote.

Use of Force Registry (SB 23) — Establish a use-of-force database that will be overseen by the Department of Public Safety which will collect reports of use of force by a municipal police officer, municipal correctional facility employee, probation officer, parole officer, correctional officer, state trooper, village public safety officer or regional officer.

Public Schools: Mental Health Education (SB 24) — Amends existing health education curriculum to include mental health in K-12 health classrooms to adequately educate students on vital information pertaining to mental health symptoms, resources, and treatment. This bill will be heard in the Senate Finance Committee on February 7th.

Asian American/Pacific Islander Program (SB 131) — Teaching students in Kindergarten through 12th grade about the contributions of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities to the economic, cultural, social, and political development of the United States. Several other states across the country have passed similar bills which allows students to feel empowered and to understand their ethnic identities as well as their personal civic duty. This is scheduled to be heard in Senate State Affairs on February 8th.

Education for Deaf & Hearing Impaired (SB 143) companion to HB111 — This bill is a deaf and hard of hearing children's bill of rights that establishes consistency in the information provided to parents by the school district, allows parents to choose the best method of communication for their child and requires the school district to provide services using the parent's chosen method of communication. This bill is currently waiting to be heard on Senate Education committee.

New Legislation

Stay at Work/Return to Work (SB 206) – Was introduced on January 24th, and it has been referred to the Senate Labor & Commer Committee. This bill adds a Return-to-Work Coordinator to State Statutes to assist with planning for individuals who experience on the job injuries resulting in compensable time loss injuries. The program will help supervisors manage employee injury, illness and disability and ensure that employees can return to the workplace as quickly and safely as possible.

Chronic Kidney Disease Awareness Month (SR 3) – This Senate Resolution was introduced on January 24th, and it has been referred to Senate Community & Regional Affairs. This Resolution aims to recognize March as Chronic Kidney Disease Awareness Month in Alaska to raise awareness of the need for research, screening programs and access to care for individuals who suffer from chronic kidney disease.

Budgets

My focus continues to be developing a comprehensive and sustainable fiscal plan. During the last legislative session, we made some progress but still have lots of work to do.

Capital Budget. As usual, you can submit your priorities through the legislative capital budget website. The deadline for submittal is February 14th.

- The Capital Project Submission & Information System (CAPSIS) is now open until mid-February so I am encouraging my community councils to consider what projects they might want to submit for consideration.
- The Capital budget has been relatively thin the last few years due to the State's current fiscal climate, but it is important that projects are noted so that when the fiscal climate recovers, we can address the most pressing projects. The reality – even without current funding, listing needed projects serves as placeholders for the future.
- I'm hopeful that some of the projects that were not funded during the last session, will qualify for funding through the infrastructure funds.

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Committee Membership

I currently serve on the following committees.

- Legislative Council, **Chair**
- Education, **Member**
- Community and Regional Affairs, **Member**
- Labor and Commerce, **Member**
- Commerce, Community and Economic Development (*Finance Subcommittee*), **Member**
- Health (*Finance Subcommittee*), **Member**
- Labor and Workforce Development (*Finance Subcommittee*), **Member**
- Family & Community Services (*Finance Subcommittee*), **Member**

Governor's Joint Session:

During the 50-minute speech, the Governor asked legislators to pass bills related to education, agriculture, home ownership, and the supply of natural gas for Southcentral Alaska. He urged lawmakers to approve cash bonuses to teachers who stay in Alaska. That idea, introduced in legislation by the Governor, has been included in SB 140.

Other Governor-proposed bills mentioned Tuesday night included a proposal to reduce the down payments for first-time homeowners who seek loans from the Alaska Housing Finance Corp. and legislation that would reduce costs for farmers.

Senate District G Office

My staff and I are in our Juneau office for the session. We are always available to assist you with your concerns so feel free to stop by, email me or call the office at 907-465- 4930.

Always representing your interests!

