

How will our budget crisis affect education?

The Alaskan economy is taking a hit.

This is the week that the Senate tries to have a budget prepared for discussion. We'll see if that happens. Last week, by a 21-19 vote, the House passed [House Bill 56](#) Approp: Supplemental. This is a "fast-track" Supplemental budget bill designed to address the shortcomings in the current fiscal year, which ends June 30. There isn't enough money to cover this almost \$200 million dollar bill without drawing from the Constitutional Budget Reserve funds. This is \$111 million in unanticipated expenditures and an \$80 million shortfall based on the price of oil. The vote to withdraw funds needs a two-thirds majority and that measure failed 21-19. The bill now goes to the Senate, where they will add it to the agenda in Senate Finance.

This means that the focus of the legislature now moves headlong into budget discussions. The two major bills we have been focused on are now converging in Senate Finance where they will be considered along with their budget impacts.

The fate of the education bill [HB69 \(Education Funding: Increase BSA\)](#), (which is now CSHB 69(RLS) AM - the committee substitute for HB69) is in the Senate Finance Committee. This bill, along with the Supplemental budget, the PFD payout, and all of the other funding requests, will be up for discussion. With Alaska facing lower oil prices, federal government cuts, stock market turmoil, the deficit from last year and no consensus in the House on how to raise any revenue, it is a difficult time ahead.

[SB64 \(Elections\)](#) was approved in Senate State Affairs on March 27th and moved to Senate Finance where it will be heard on April 9th. There was still a bit of confusion on some of the technical language within this bill, so there might still yet be some amendments before it moves forward. This will likely be one of the last times there will be public testimony on this bill in the Senate before it would move to the House.

So for all Alaskans concerned about our state, our government services, our ability and access to voting, and our PFD, the Senate Finance Committee is the place to watch with meetings every day next week.

Recap of the All-Alaska LWV Virtual Town Hall.

On Thursday, March 27th, former Senator Mark Begich and Alex Ortiz (former chief of staff to Congressman Young and Congresswoman Peltola), discussed how to effectively make our voices heard in Congress. Some key takeaways: find places where you can agree with what the Senators/Representative are doing; be polite and offer help or guidance on how to change something; write a personal note on what it means to you directly don't just rely on 'form letters/emails'.

The town hall was well attended, but we always hope to see more of you. If you have ideas or suggestions on future town halls, OR whether the early evening time is better than noon, please let us know at alaskalwv@alaskalwv.org.

And, don't forget - you can always add your voice to let our Senators and Representative know how you feel.

Email Sen. Sullivan at: <https://www.sullivan.senate.gov/contact/email>

Email Sen. Murkowski at: <https://www.murkowski.senate.gov/contact/email>

Email Rep. Begich at: <https://begich.house.gov/contact/email-me>

Legislation Tracking

There was a hearing on [HB98 Maximum Pupil-Teacher Ratio](#) on March 28th. Rep. Fields explained why the current PTR (Pupil-Teacher Ratio) is the wrong metric when looking at actual class sizes. Most parents know this. Alaska's PTR is 18; while some actual class sizes could be close 35. This bill uses actual class size (not PTR) to set maximum numbers of students in each class. As it is currently worded, this bill only affects Anchorage schools, but could be used elsewhere if there is interest.

This was a great conversation about the impact of class size on student success, plus some really interesting documents that dig into the details. [Watch it here](#) if you're interested in the details.

New bills

There were a few new bills introduced in March. Most of these won't move forward this year, but will be on the record for the next session. A few of these bills are ones that we will add to our "watch list" of bills:

[HB163 Election Date; Election Holiday, Terms](#) (municipal and school board elections) - Rep. Underwood

[HB160 Municipal School Board Terms](#) - Rep. Moore
and [SB143 Municipal School Board Terms](#) - Sen. Yundt (will be heard this week)
(both are nearly identical bills moving control of school board elections to the municipality)

[HB165 Maximum Pupil-Teacher Ratio](#) - Reps. Coulombe, Fields

[HB168 Civics Education](#) - Rep. Johnson (Note: [SB23 Civics Education](#) has passed Senate Education and is waiting for a hearing in Senate Finance.

Upcoming Meetings – Week of April 7th

Meetings covering our watchlist bills/areas are listed below.

***How to testify:** If you can't attend in person, please call your Legislative Information Office (<http://akleg.gov/lios.php>), and also review the testimony instructions at: https://akleg.gov/docs/pdf/AKLEG_Testimony_Instructions.pdf. If you need further information contact the Juneau Legislative Information office at 907-465-4648.

[House Education Committee](#) - (Meets MWF 8:00 am Davis 106)

Send written testimony to: House.Education@akleg.gov

Monday, April 7th

[HB 90: Financial Literacy in Schools](#) < PUBLIC TESTIMONY >

Wednesday, April 9th

[HB76: Education: Schools; Grants; Funding; Debt](#) <Invited Testimony only>

Friday, April 11th

[HB76: Education: Schools; Grants; Funding; Debt](#) <Invited Testimony only>

Also: Presentation: School Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism by Commissioner Deena Bishop and Karen Morrison, Deputy Commissioner

House State Affairs Committee - (Meets T TH SA 3:15 pm Gruenberg 120)

Send written testimony to: House.State.Affairs@akleg.gov

Thursday, April 10th

HB16: Campaign finance contribution limits

House Judiciary Committee - (Meets MWF 1:00 pm Gruenberg 120)

Send written testimony to: House.Judiciary@akleg.gov

Senate Education Committee - (Meets MWF 3:30 pm Beltz 105)

Send written testimony to: Senate.Education@akleg.gov

Wednesday, April 9th

SB143: Municipal School Board Terms <Invited and PUBLIC TESTIMONY>

Senate State Affairs - (Meets T TH 3:30 pm Beltz 105)

Send written testimony to: Senate.State.Affairs@akleg.gov

Senate Finance - - (Meets M T W TH F 9:00 am Senate Finance 532) (special times next week also M T W TH 1:30 pm)

Wednesday, April 9th 9:00 am (may also be heard in the afternoon)

SB64: Elections <Invited and PUBLIC TESTIMONY>

Legislative Calendar and Events

- April 20, 2025 - 90th day of the session (By law (AS 24.05.150))
- May 21, 2025 - 121st day of the session (Per the Alaska Constitution)

Wrap Up/Links

How are we doing?

Let us know! Reach us at alaskalwv@alaskalwv.org, and/or work to get the word out with your local leagues! Board meetings every third Monday at 5:45 pm.

The League always needs volunteers! Writing letters, talking to your legislators, and helping out by giving us your feedback - it doesn't have to be a total commitment.

We would LOVE to hear from you. Please encourage others to take action by sharing this Legislative Newsletter, Action Alerts, and Calendar Events.

Quick links:

- Alaska State Legislature website, akleg.gov
- Alaska State's Gavel to Gavel public affairs TV network, www.ktoo.org/gavel/

You can see your LWV Alaska Board members and Officers and their contact information on the AlaskaLWV.org/Board/ site.

League of Women Voters of Alaska

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