

Trust

Alaska Mental Health
Trust Authority



FY18 Operating Budget Conference Committee Items

The Alaska State Legislature is currently meeting in a Special Session called by Governor Walker with a list of bills and budget items legislators are tasked to address. The Operating and Mental Health budgets (HB 57/HB 59) are on that list. A meeting of the budget Conference Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, June 6 at 4:00pm. We are inviting advocates to contact legislators (see contacts below) and voice their opinions about the following "conferenceable" budget items, which are still on the table for negotiation. Thank you!

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Day Habilitation (DHSS)

House: No increase

Senate: \$1,486,000 increase

Ask: Please support the [Senate recommendation for Day Habilitation Services](#).

Impact: The Senate recommendation would add funding to increase Day Habilitation services from 8 to 12 hours. Day habilitation services may be provided to assist Alaskans with disabilities to acquire, retain, and improve the self-help, socialization, and adaptive skills necessary to live successfully in home and community-based settings. The services support recipients in increasing their independence; participating in community activities; learning, improving and retaining social skills; and providing a foundation of skills that promote employability.

Public Health Nursing (DHSS)

Governor's FY18 Budget: +\$500,000 transfer from Public Health Administration

House: Same as Governor

Senate: -\$1.9 million

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for Public Health Nursing](#).

Impact: The Senate reductions will eliminate 11 positions and force the closure of public health centers in Kenai and Kodiak, adding to the recent elimination of 40 positions statewide including the nurses that provided services in Seward, Cordova, Haines, Wrangell, Galena, Fort Yukon, and Delta Junction. Public health nurses provide community health services, including immunizations, prenatal counseling and postpartum outreach, senior care, well-child exams, TB screening and treatment, school screenings, STD screening, and health education. Community Health Centers cannot bill for the majority of services public health nursing provides, and will not be able to pick up those services. The result will be a loss of prevention health care in those communities. Public health nurses also work in the community to provide health education, emergency preparedness plans, community health assessments, and more.

Medicaid Prescription Drugs (DHSS)

Governor's FY18 Budget: No increase, no reduction

House: Same as Governor

Senate: -\$2.9 million

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for Medicaid Prescription Drugs.](#)

Impact: The Senate proposal to cut Medicaid Pharmacy services by \$2.9 million (\$1.9 million in federal funds and \$973,500 in state general funds) will result in further cost containment and prioritization of prescription medications, which could affect beneficiary medication regimens, causing negative health consequences and reduced functioning that can affect an individual's ability to work, go to school, parent, and remain stable in the community.

Behavioral Health Medicaid Services (DHSS)

Governor's FY18 Budget: +\$15.8 million

House: Same as Governor

Senate: -\$462,000

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for Behavioral Health Medicaid Services.](#)

Impact: Additional Behavioral Health Medicaid funds are needed to ensure the goals of Medicaid reform AND criminal justice reform are met. Both systems rely on timely access to appropriate behavioral health services to avoid more expensive alternatives like hospitalizations and incarceration. Reductions in access to community behavioral health services will result in increased pressure on API, increased utilization of emergency departments, and long waits for treatment. Pre-trial diversion efforts will be affected by limited access to treatment to avoid incarceration.

Alaska Pioneer Homes (DHSS)

Governor FY18 budget: No increase, no reduction

House: Same as Governor

Senate: -\$6.5 million

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for Pioneer Homes.](#)

Impact: The Senate has proposed two reductions in two separate actions: -2.75% reduction (\$818,500) for Pioneer Homes personal services, and -12.7% reduction (\$5.7 million) for the Pioneer Homes. Together the Senate reductions total -\$6.5 million. The \$818,500 will likely result in the loss of two nurses, six nurse's aides, one part-time nurse's aide, and the closure of 26 beds. Over the past three years, the division has lost 38 positions, resulting in the closure of nearly 30 beds and an increased wait time for seniors on the waitlist. As has been widely reported, the \$5.7 million cut could force the closure of the Palmer Veterans Home and the Juneau Pioneer Home. On April 13, the Senate passed a declaration directing DHSS to spread that amount throughout the department to avoid closing any Home. The Governor also sent a letter, stating that he will do everything he can to ensure that no Home is closed while he is governor. However, the \$5.7 million cut would still result in reduced capacity in the Pioneer Homes.

Adult Preventative Dental Services (DHSS)

Governor's FY18 Budget: No increase, no reduction

House: Same as Governor

Senate: -\$288,000

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for Adult Preventative Dental Services.](#)

Impact: A 10% reduction in Adult Preventative Dental Medicaid services will result in some beneficiaries going without access to medically necessary dental care, which will result in higher utilization of other services – particularly emergency rooms services for untreated abscesses, pain, and collateral health consequences from poor dental health.

Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) (DHSS)

Governor's FY18 Budget: No increase, no reduction

House: Same as Governor

Senate: -\$631,300 cut

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for Alaska Psychiatric Institute \(API\)](#).

Impact: The Senate reduction would eliminate premium pay for nursing staff. API is already struggling to recruit and maintain staff due to the complexity and acuity of its patient population. Without the financial incentive of premium pay, API will not be able to compete for highly qualified staff – which will affect the health and safety of patients (and staff) in the hospital and increase the risk and cost to the State for workplace injury, inappropriate seclusion and restraint, delayed admissions, and patient complaints.

McLaughlin Youth Center (DHSS)

Governor's request: +\$100,000

House: Same as Governor

Senate: -\$763,600

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for the McLaughlin Youth Center](#).

Impact: The Senate reduction will result in the closure of the Community Detention Program (an alternative to detention) at both McLaughlin Youth Center and the Mat-Su Youth Facility. In FY 16 the program diverted 183 youth from expensive beds in detention. Community detention serves youth who commit low level offenses, who are not a serious risk to themselves or others, and who need additional supports, such as case dismissal, diversion, probation, treatment, etc. The program allows youth to come to the facility for the day, attend school and obtain services, such as anger management and drug and alcohol counselling, then go home at night. Without this program, youth moving instead to expensive detention beds could grow by 150-200 per year. McLaughlin Youth Facility is already over capacity, so a new wing will need to be opened to accommodate the additional youth, at a cost of about \$1.6 million per year to operate.

Front Line Social Workers (DHSS)

Governor's FY18 Budget: -\$225,000 reduction

House: +\$4,972,000 increase

Senate: -\$886,200 reduction

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for Front Line Social Workers](#).

Impact: The Senate reduction would eliminate six full-time positions responsible for ensuring quality of services, client grievances and appeals, compliance with federal performance improvement plans, foster care payment processing, and other duties. Staffing and resource limitations will also impair the division's ability to locate and assess relatives for foster care placement. The increase recommended by the House would add 31 positions and improve training that would help OCS serve families better and bring caseloads down to a safer and more manageable level, closer to professional standards.

Parents as Teachers (DEED)

Governor's FY18 Budget: No increase, no reduction

House: Same as Governor

Senate: -\$500,000 (in the Early Learning Coordination allocation)

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for Parents as Teachers](#).

Impact: The Senate cut will eliminate the Alaska Parents as Teachers program to provide parent education and family support services to families of young children in more than 50 communities and villages statewide. Certified parent educators work closely with parents to provide information and tools that promote language development, intellectual growth, social development, and motor skills. Delivery includes home visits and multi-family group activities.

Best Beginnings (DEED)

Governor's FY18 Budget: No increase, no reduction

House: [Same as Governor](#)

Senate: -\$320,000 (in the Early Learning Coordination allocation)

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for Best Beginnings](#).

Impact: The Senate reduction will eliminate Alaska's Best Beginnings program to serve families across the state in promoting early education and literacy. Best Beginnings is a public-private partnership that focuses on parent engagement and education, community support for early childhood, language and literacy.

Pre-Kindergarten Grants (DEED)

Governor's FY18 Budget: No increase, no reduction

House: [Same as Governor](#)

Senate: -\$2 million

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for Pre-K grants](#).

Impact: The Senate recommendation would eliminate grant funds for in-school preschool programs that serve low-income families. Pre-K program grantees help children learn social and academic skills needed to be ready for kindergarten, working in classrooms and as outreach to families who prefer in-home care for their preschoolers. Public schools may use grant funds to subcontract with family child care centers, faith-based settings, Head Start programs, and private child care centers to provide these services.

K-12 Aid to School Districts (Base Student Allocation (BSA)) (DEED)

Governor's FY18 Budget: Fully funds the BSA

House: [Same as Governor](#)

Senate: -5% cut to the BSA

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for the Base Student Allocation \(BSA\)](#).

Impact: The Senate reduction will likely result in the prioritization of core education components and reduce funding for support programs and services that serve students with disabilities.

Alaska Temporary Assistance Program (ATAP) (DHSS)

Governor's FY18 Budget: No increase, no reduction

House: [Same as Governor](#)

Senate: -\$3 million

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for the Adult Temporary Assistance Program](#).

Impact: The Senate's -\$3 million reduction, on top of last year's -\$7 million reduction, will compound ATAP's existing deficit and increase the need for a supplemental request in 2018 to avoid a penalty by the federal government for failure to meet its maintenance of effort obligations. If that happens, the federal government will reduce dollar-for-dollar the state's federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) grant the following year. The program provides cash assistance and work services to low-income families with children to help with basic needs while they work to become self-sufficient.

Adult Public Assistance (APA) (DHSS)

Governor's FY18 Budget: No increase, no reduction

House: [Reduces surplus funding in Public Assistance and gives it to OCS front line social workers](#)

Senate: -\$3.5 million

Ask: Please support the [House recommendation for the Alaska Public Assistance program](#).

Impact: Department projections indicate a reduced APA caseload, resulting in \$3.5 million of "excess" funding. The House proposed using \$3.3 million of this excess funding to support front line social workers in OCS. The

Senate reduction would eliminate the \$3.3 million (not transferred to OCS) and an additional \$210,000, for a total of a \$3.5 million reduction to the program. APA provides cash assistance to Alaskans in need, whether they are elderly, blind, or disabled, to help them remain independent and in the community.

Public Assistance Field Services (DHSS)

Governor's FY18 Budget: +\$1.3 million

House: Same as Governor

Senate: -\$828,000

Ask: Please support the [House](#) recommendation for [Public Assistance Field Services](#).

Impact: The Senate reductions will eliminate 13 positions and force the closure of public assistance field offices in Homer, Kodiak, Sitka, and Kotzebue. Bethel staff will be reduced. Thousands of Alaskans that depend on public assistance programs will have to work through fee agents or through urban offices, increasing the delay in processing applications and determining eligibility for Medicaid, Food Stamps, and other programs. Most field services staff are case workers serving people who temporarily need public assistance to care for their families, with some caseloads as high as 100 families per worker. Field service staff provide training, conduct fraud investigations, collect claims, help develop plans for becoming self-sufficient, and measure the performance of the division's programs and staff.

Information Technology (DOC)

Governor's FY18 Budget: +\$546,200

House: -\$546,200

Senate: Same as Governor

Ask: Please support the [Senate](#) recommendation for [Information Technology](#) in the DOC budget.

Impact: The House reduction would eliminate DOC's request to transfer funds for four positions from the closed Palmer Correctional Center to DOC's Information Technology (IT) section within the department. These positions would assist implementation of a new Electronic Health Records system and web aspects related to the new pretrial division, improve IT infrastructure, and enhance the department's ability to collect, monitor, and analyze data for reporting criminal justice reform outcomes.

NOTE:

DHSS = Department of Health & Social Services

DEED = Department of Education & Early Development

DOC = Department of Corrections