

# STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES  
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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1

*Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Advisory Council*

## Meeting Minutes

Wednesday & Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008

### Call to Order

*Co-Chair, Scott Merriner* welcomed members and called to order the eleventh meeting of the **Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (FBCI) Advisory Council** at 9:35 am, on Wednesday, March 12, 2008, at the Alaska Office Building in Juneau.

### Welcome & Moment of Silence

*Scott Merriner* convened the meeting with a moment of silence and reviewed the meeting's agenda.

**Council members present:** Scott Merriner, Loren Leman, Kathleen Svenson, Julie Morris, Lucy Hansen, Nancy Campbell, Keith Hamilton, Glen Clary, Eugene Harnett, Cindy Cashen, June Ulz, Jay Pullins for Lt. Governor Sean Parnell, Robert Flint, Judy Fulp, & Allen Levy

**Council members not present:** Kim Patterson, Gloria Tokar, Jeanie Greene, Mike Enschede, Diane Johnson, & Ryan Ray

**Staff members present:** Michael Curran, Ann Marie Sack & Stephanie Wheeler

**Also present:** Commissioner Karleen Jackson (Department of Health and Social Services) and Lt. Governor Sean Parnell via teleconference.

### Council Member Introductions on the House and the Senate Floor

Council members were scheduled to be introduced on the House floor at 10:00 am. However, this did not occur due to changes in the House schedule. Council members were introduced on the Senate floor, by Senator Fred Dyson of Eagle River. Council member and former Lt. Governor **Loren Leman** delivered a brief address to the Senate from the gallery regarding the purpose of the Council's visit to Juneau and thanked the Senators for serving the State of Alaska.

*Co-chair Scott Merriner* reconvened the meeting at 12:15 pm and welcomed Karleen Jackson, the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services, to the meeting to discuss the current status of the FBCI Office and the Council's budget and future.

### Commissioner Karleen Jackson meets with the Council

The following are highlights:

- The 90-day legislative session has been very challenging for DHSS staff and other State departments. The shortened session has impacted the rules and shortened the time for budget writing, making it more difficult and exhausting than before.
- The FBCI Office and Council have been caught in the middle of a larger struggle.
- The current situation facing the Office and Council is grim. The House has removed the funding requested for the Office and Council and the current budget is being discussed in the Senate.
- Since the Senate Finance Committee has not met yet, a tiny sliver of hope for the Office and Council remains. If the Senate funds them, this budget item could be "conferenceable."

- All division budgets under DHSS have been challenged during the Legislature’s budget writing.
- In response to the Council’s questions regarding why the Office has not spent the Human Services Matching Grant Funds for rural Alaska, Commissioner Jackson reported that no administrative costs were budgeted, making it very difficult for the three person office to distribute and manage these funds.
- DHSS does not want to lose “what’s been built” by the Office and Council. The Department would like to continue their funding. However DHSS is constrained on how it can spend its budget, which limits the Department’s ability to continue funding the Office and Council.
- If the Office and Council are not funded in FY09, then DHSS would like to support the Office by giving it time to transition.
  - The Office and Council should consider developing two plans:
    - Plan A: If the Office and Council are not funded this year, what would a transition timeline look like?
    - Plan B: If the Office and Council are funded this year, then what steps should be taken to ensure longterm sustainability for the Office and Council?

**Scott’s report on Faith-Led Alliance for the Maintenance and Empowerment of Foster Families (FLAME)**

- A working group of 40-50 people has formed, consisting of representatives from the Office of Children’s Services, various non-profit organizations, and faith-based organizations.
- This group has met over seven afternoons and has researched other extraordinary partnerships targeting foster care around the country.
  - According to the research:
    - Full State commitment is required if a foster care initiative involving faith-based, government, and non-profit organizations is to be successful.
    - The State cannot establish the partnerships. The faith-based community must make it happen, which requires money, time, and focus.
    - Texas’ foster care initiative has been able to recruit 42 foster homes. Texas designated 24 positions within its Office of Children’s Services to work specifically with faith-based organizations.
- Big issues surrounding FLAME:
  - Will there be commitment from the State’s leaders?
  - A strategic plan needs to be developed.
  - Faith-based groups need to count the costs before moving forward.
  - FLAME is able to happen only because of the existence and leadership of the Office and Council, especially because Alaska’s OCS has not had good participation from faith-based groups in the past.
- *Jay Pullins* suggested that the Office and Council consider creating a structure that is not subject to the winds of political change; not placing conditions on plans regarding FLAME (because you cannot guarantee success); and recognizing that the State can create the window of opportunity to enlist help from the faith-based community to address foster care, but the State cannot do the work.

**Members dialogue about the implications of a budget cut and the future of the Office & Council**

- *Allen* mentioned that the Council needs to be proactive about its destiny.
- *Loren* suggested that the Office and Council are likely “innocent bystanders” and are being impacted by bigger issues that are beyond the Council’s control.

- **Scott** shared that the FBCI Task Force initially recommended that the Office have a different structure, rather than have it be part of State government. However, Governor Murkowski was prompt in establishing the Office and Council in State government through an Executive Order.
- **Julie** was concerned about the reality that the Office staff could lose their positions by July 1, 2008.
- **Judy** stated that the corporate memory that Office and Council have developed is very important and would be a great loss to the State if they are not funded.
- **Cindy** shared that the issues the Office and Council are faced with in having to demonstrate their positive impact goes back to the pipeline days when money went to programs that have not been proven to be effective; therefore this is the risk the Office and Council take as being part of DHSS. The foster care initiative could potentially save the Office and Council.
- **Judy** thought that the Council needs to see the “handwriting on the wall” and be ready for change, because the State’s problems will only get bigger.
- **Kathleen** stated that the Council is up against the perception by some of the need for “separation of church and state” and the only publicity the Office and Council have received tends to be negative. A huge misconception exists in the public about Office and Council activities.
- **Lucy** thought we need a back up plan, at least for the three Office staff.
- **Bob** shared how the FBCI Task Force originally recommended that faith-based organizations be more of a stakeholder, and thought that they need to have more ownership in the foster care issue.
- **Scott** stated that as a Council, we will advise the Governor on a possible future alternative structure for the Office and Council. During the 2008-09 school year, the Council will tackle the issue of coming up with alternative structure options, and by January 2009, come up with a timeframe for how to transition. The optimal situation would be to receive the funding for the Office and Council as requested, but if that does not happen, the next best option would be to encourage the Administration to give the Office and Council at least one year to transition.
- **Allen** expressed that it’s very difficult for faith-based organizations (fbos) to get money and to continue asking fbos to come up with money, it seems that the Legislature is being let off the hook.
- **Cindy** suggested that the Office consider developing two types of annual reports in the future, one designed specifically for legislators, and one for others in the public.
- **Julie** reminded members that there will be at least one more Council meeting to discuss the future of the Office and Council.

**Council Members planned for legislative visits and developed talking points**

**Scott** designated **Keith Hamilton** to be the acting co-chair for Thursday’s legislative visits. Council members divided up into three teams and assigned each team to meet with several legislators.

The following are talking points Council members can use when talking with legislators:

- What we need and why: \$470,000 to be reinstated for the Office and Advisory Council in the DHSS budget

<b>\$760,000</b>	<b>Total FBCI and Advisory Council Budget for FY09</b>
290,000	(from federal funds-- requires State match)

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**\$470,000** = Total amount of State General Funds requested by FBCI and will fulfill the federal match requirement

- This is a small request and a little bit of seed money up front can save on the back end:
- In one year: Alaskans volunteer \$200 million worth of time. If the Office increased/leveraged the hours donated by volunteers by just 1%, that would be \$2 million in value to the State

- Please take the time to review the FBCI Yearly Update, which highlights the many successes delivered by this Initiative
- We'd like to highlight one success in particular:
  - a. Foster Care Initiative (page 5 in yearly update)
    - i. The Office and Advisory Council have made Alaska's foster care crisis its number one priority
    - ii. The goal of the Foster Care Initiative is to close the gap between needs and the number of foster homes by creating 300 new foster homes
    - iii. Meeting this goal will be more difficult if the FBCI Office is not funded.
- Does Alaska really want to be the first state in the Union to eliminate its Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives when Alaska ranks the lowest by several indicators of social dysfunction?

**Approval of Minutes:** Council members approved the minutes from the January 11th, 2008, meeting, as edited.

#### **Lt. Governor Sean Parnell speaks to the Council**

The following are highlights from the Lt. Governor's telephonic report to the Council:

- He thanked his staff for help writing a letter to Senator Donny Olson expressing his support for the Office and Council
- Thanked the Council for its efforts and mentioned that there is no reason to give up hope
- It is important to identify and talk to key people
- It is very important to show exactly how the Office and Council saves the State money, because a little bit of seed money up front can save on the back end
- Regarding ideas for how to restructure, the Council could consider moving into the private sector, with donated private funds, perhaps, for example, from a willed estate to fund the Office
- By the Governor including the Office and Council in her budget, she is demonstrating her support

#### **Council Member Allen Levy proposes idea to the Council**

- At the last Council meeting, *Allen* showed a video documenting his experience volunteering at a youth camp in New Mexico that centered on building peace among young Israeli and Palestinian girls
- As a follow-up, *Allen* reported to the Council that the directors of that camp would be very interested in helping start a similar program for the youth in Alaska--particularly Alaska Native youth
- The following options could be considered by the Council if there is interest in helping expand the contributions of this camp program to Alaska:
  - The Council could look at ways to raise travel scholarships and/or find people to sponsor youth to attend the camp in New Mexico
  - The Council could raise funds to bring the camp's program people to Alaska to help train Alaskans so the camp can occur in Alaska.

#### **Thursday, March 13, 2008**

- Council members divided into three teams to visit the Capitol.
- Teams were tasked with visiting legislators to provide an update on the Office and Council, to distribute the yearly update, and to invite legislators to attend the late afternoon reception.
- An informal reception was held from 4:30-5:30 pm in the Capitol's Fahrenkamp Room.

March 21, 2008

Page 5

**Next FBCI Advisory Council Meeting Scheduled:**

Friday, June 13<sup>th</sup>, at the Frontier Building, Anchorage.

**Adjournment**

*Scott Merriner* closed with prayer and then adjourned the meeting at 4:45 pm on Wednesday, March, 12, 2008.

Minutes submitted by: Ann Marie Sack (Associate Coordinator)

Minutes approved by: Stephanie Wheeler (Executive Director) & Scott Merriner (Advisory Council Co-Chair)