



CHILDREN, FAMILIES, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES INTERIM COMMITTEE

69th Montana Legislature

SENATE MEMBERS

John Esp
Dennis Lenz
Cora Neumann
Mike Yakawich

HOUSE MEMBERS

Melody Cunningham
Jodee Etchart
SJ Howell
George Nikolakakos
Melissa Nikolakakos

COMMITTEE STAFF

Milly Allen – Lead Staff
Maddie Krezowski – Legal Staff
Emily McKay – Legal Staff
Jolanda Songer - Secretary

MINUTES LOG

January 13, 2026
Capitol Room 137 & Zoom
Helena, Montana

Please note: This document is a Minutes Log and provides annotation of the time elapsed between the beginning of the meeting and the time at which the item was presented or discussed, a motion was made, or a vote was taken. The narrative presented here is provided only as a guide to the audio or video recording of the meeting. The official discussion, motion, or vote is available on the audio or video archive of this meeting. The Legislature does not prepare a transcript of the meeting activities. The time designation may be used to locate the referenced discussion on the audio or video recording of this meeting.

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MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Jodee Etchart, Presiding Officer (R)
Rep. SJ Howell, Vice Presiding Officer (D)
Sen. John Esp (R)
Sen. Dennis Lenz (R)
Rep. George Nikolakakos (R)
Rep. Melissa Nikolakakos (R)
Sen. Mike Yakawich (R)

MEMBERS EXCUSED:

Rep. Melody Cunningham (D)
Sen. Cora Neumann (D)

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT:

Milly Allen, Lead Staff
Maddie Krezowski, Legal Staff
Emily McKay, Legal Staff
Ania Alduenda, Secretary

AGENDA ([Attachment 1](#))

VISITORS' LIST ([Attachment 2](#))

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

08:30:14 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM. The committee secretary took roll.

AGENCY OVERSIGHT: DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

08:31:00 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

Department Presentation

08:31:05 Charlie Brereton, Director, Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS)

[EXHIBIT 1](#)

08:32:28 Gene Hermanson, Deputy Medicaid Director, DPHHS
(See Exhibit 1)

Committee Questions / Discussion

08:45:05 Sen. John Esp

08:47:19 Gene Hermanson, DPHHS

08:47:34 Sen. Cora Neumann joined the meeting.

08:48:03 Dir. Charlie Brereton, DPHHS

08:48:29 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell

08:49:24 Gene Hermanson, DPHHS

08:51:17 Dir. Charlie Brereton, DPHHS

08:52:53 Sen. Cora Neumann

08:53:18 Dir. Charlie Brereton, DPHHS

[EXHIBIT 2](#), Page 60

08:53:48 Gene Hermanson, DPHHS

Department Presentation - Continued

08:58:11 Dir. Charlie Brereton, DPHHS

08:58:26 Matt Waller, Executive Director, Health Care Facilities, DPHHS
(See Exhibit 1)

Committee Questions / Discussion

09:09:57 Sen. Mike Yakawich

09:12:07 Matt Waller, DPHHS

09:12:18 Sen. John Esp

09:12:40 Matt Waller, DPHHS

09:12:46 Dr. Daniel Bemporad, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Montana State Hospital, DPHHS

09:13:27 Sen. Cora Neumann

09:15:31 Matt Waller, DPHHS

09:16:25 Dir. Charlie Brereton, DPHHS

Department Presentation - Continued

09:17:51 Rebecca de Camara, Executive Director, Medicaid and Health Services, DPHHS
(See Exhibit 1)

Committee Questions / Discussion

09:22:13 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
09:22:35 Rebecca de Camara, DPHHS
09:25:52 Sen. Cora Neumann
09:27:07 Rebecca de Camara, DPHHS
09:27:31 Jessie Counts, Executive Director, Human Services, DPHHS
09:34:12 Dir. Charlie Brereton, DPHHS
09:34:52 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
09:35:04 Rebecca de Camara, DPHHS

Department Presentation - Continued

09:37:12 Dir. Charlie Brereton, DPHHS
09:37:27 Nikki Grossberg, Administrator, Child and Family Services Division, DPHHS
(See Exhibit 1)
09:46:21 Rep. Melody Cunningham joined the meeting via Zoom.

Committee Questions / Discussion

09:57:54 Sen. John Esp
09:58:12 Sen. Dennis Lenz
10:00:12 Nikki Grossberg, DPHHS
10:07:09 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
10:07:29 Nikki Grossberg, DPHHS
10:09:37 Sen. John Esp
10:10:42 Sen. Mike Yakawich
10:11:11 Nikki Grossberg, DPHHS
10:12:53 Sen. Cora Neumann
10:13:24 Nikki Grossberg, DPHHS
10:14:06 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
10:14:44 Dir. Charlie Brereton, DPHHS

Public Comment

10:15:08 Carter Marsh, Lead Legislative Liaison, Montana Professional Firefighters
10:17:17 Amanda Frickle, Political Director, Montana American Federation of Labor and
Congress of Industrial Organizations (MT AFL-CIO)
10:21:33 Mary Collins, Policy Director, Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies of Montana
(HMHB-MT)
10:25:17 Shyla Patera, North Central Independent Living Services

Discussion

10:28:18 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

10:28:31 Sen. John Esp
[EXHIBIT 3](#)

10:29:18 **Recessed**

10:39:29 **Reconvened**

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 13: EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE PROVIDER PANEL

10:39:33 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

10:40:07 Milly Allen, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
[EXHIBIT 4](#)
[EXHIBIT 5](#)
[EXHIBIT 6](#)
[EXHIBIT 7](#)

10:40:57 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
[EXHIBIT 8](#)

Panel

10:43:34 Don Whalen, Manager, Missoula Emergency Services (MESI) & President,
Montana Ambulance Association (MTAA)

Committee Questions / Discussion

10:54:39 Sen. John Esp

10:54:44 Don Whalen, MESI & MTAA

10:56:22 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

10:56:42 Don Whalen, MESI & MTAA

10:57:39 Sen. Mike Yakawich

10:58:11 Don Whalen, MESI & MTAA

10:58:56 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

10:59:11 Rich Cowger, Chief, Columbus Fire and Rescue

10:59:59 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

11:00:04 Don Whalen, MESI & MTAA

11:00:21 Sen. John Esp

11:00:34 Don Whalen, MESI & MTAA

11:01:31 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

Panel - Continued

11:01:46 Dominic Pomponio, Regional Vice President, Life Flight Network

Committee Questions / Discussion

11:10:35 Sen. John Esp

11:11:01 Dominic Pomponio, Life Flight Network
(See Exhibit 5)

11:11:14 Milly Allen, LSD
(See Exhibit 5)
11:13:53 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
11:14:10 Dominic Pomponio, Life Flight Network
11:14:24 Sen. Cora Neumann
11:15:05 Dominic Pomponio, Life Flight Network
11:18:17 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
11:18:44 Dominic Pomponio, Life Flight Network

Panel - Continued

11:21:13 Chief Rich Cowger, Columbus Fire and Rescue

Committee Questions / Discussion

11:33:41 Sen. John Esp
11:34:13 Chief Rich Cowger, Columbus Fire and Rescue
11:35:51 Sen. Mike Yakawich
11:36:33 Chief Rich Cowger, Columbus Fire and Rescue
11:39:00 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

Public Comment

11:39:59 Barbara Mutter, Three Forks Area Ambulance Services Provider
11:45:27 Tim Brester, Polson & Ronan & Mission Ambulance
11:49:08 Sherry Graham, Licensed Paramedic
11:51:30 Rinchen Hanley, EMT in Whitehall, MT

11:53:07 **Recessed**

12:05:00 **Reconvened**

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 13: FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE

12:05:02 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
[EXHIBIT 9](#)

Presentation

12:07:44 Shawn Baird, Montana Ambulance Association (MTAA)
(See Exhibit 7)

Committee Questions / Discussion

12:30:58 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
12:31:08 Sen. John Esp
12:31:34 Shawn Baird, MTAA
12:32:31 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
12:32:57 Shawn Baird, MTAA
12:33:31 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
12:36:17 Shawn Baird, MTAA

Public Comment

12:37:12 Carter Marsh, Montana Professional Firefighters
12:38:34 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

COMMITTEE WORK SESSION

12:40:35 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
12:41:45 Sen. Mike Yakawich

Forthcoming Agenda Topics

12:42:36 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
12:43:41 Milly Allen, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
12:46:25 Sen. Cora Neumann
12:46:32 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
12:47:41 Milly Allen, LSD
12:48:39 Sen. John Esp
12:49:58 Sen. Dennis Lenz
12:53:47 Sen. Cora Neumann
12:55:42 Milly Allen, LSD
12:56:19 Rep. Melissa Nikolakakos
12:56:42 Sen. John Esp
12:56:58 Sen. John Esp left the meeting.
12:57:26 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
13:00:22 Sen. Dennis Lenz
13:00:55 Sen. Cora Neumann
13:01:52 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
13:02:03 Sen. Cora Neumann
13:02:22 Rep. Melissa Nikolakakos
13:02:39 Rep. George Nikolakakos
13:03:13 Milly Allen, LSD

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ANY MATTER WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THE CHILDREN, FAMILIES, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE THAT IS NOT ON THE AGENDA

13:03:43 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
13:04:11 Sherry Graham, Licensed Paramedic

13:08:32 **Recessed**
14:19:00 **Reconvened**

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 48: MARIJUANA USE AND RELATED SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER ISSUES

14:19:24 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

Presentation

14:20:00 Ty Reidenbaugh, MD, Fellow of the American Society of Addiction Medicine (FASAM), Chief Medical Officer, 406 Recovery
[EXHIBIT 10](#)
[EXHIBIT 11](#)

Committee Questions / Discussion

14:38:20 Sen. Mike Yakawich
(See Exhibit 10 and 11)
14:38:30 Dr. Ty Reidenbaugh, 406 Recovery
14:40:13 Rep. George Nikolakakos
14:40:24 Dr. Ty Reidenbaugh, 406 Recovery

Public Comment

14:44:15 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
14:44:35 Ben Forsyth
[EXHIBIT 12](#)
15:02:17 Ron Paulick, Great Falls
[EXHIBIT 13](#)
15:02:40 Jean Branscum, Chief Executive Officer, Montana Medical Association
[EXHIBIT 14](#)
15:06:43 Carrie Krepps, Executive Director, Florence Crittendon Family Services
15:09:56 Leanna Troesh, Addiction Counselor

Committee Questions / Discussion

15:16:47 Sen. Mike Yakawich
[EXHIBIT 15](#)
[EXHIBIT 16](#)
15:19:12 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
15:19:51 Milly Allen, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
[EXHIBIT 17](#)

AGENCY OVERSIGHT: ADMINISTRATIVE RULE REVIEW

15:21:56 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

Presentation

15:22:00 Emily McKay, Legal Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
[EXHIBIT 18](#)

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 26: REVIEW OF PROVISIONAL DRAFT LEGISLATION

15:26:27 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

Review of Provisional Draft (HJ26 1.1) and Legislative Considerations

15:26:32 Milly Allen, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
[EXHIBIT 19](#)
[EXHIBIT 20](#)

Committee Questions / Discussion

15:32:53 Sen. Dennis Lenz
(See Exhibit 20)

15:34:29 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
(See Exhibit 20)

15:36:54 Sen. Mike Yakawich

15:37:24 Sen. Dennis Lenz
(See Exhibit 20)

15:38:31 Milly Allen, LSD
(See Exhibit 20)

15:39:15 Sen. Dennis Lenz

15:41:36 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
[EXHIBIT 21](#)

15:42:51 Sen. Cora Neumann
(See Exhibit 21)

15:44:00 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

Review of Provisional Draft (HJ26 1.1) and Legislative Considerations - Continued

15:44:32 Milly Allen, LSD
(See Exhibit 20)

15:47:54 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

Public Comment

15:48:07 Jennifer Hensley, Ability Montana

15:50:32 Christa Gabriel, Disability Rights Montana

15:53:59 JJ Carmody, Billings Clinic and Logan Health

15:56:39 Rep. Brian Close, HD 65
(See Exhibit 21)

16:04:00 Shyla Patera, North Central Independent Living

Committee Questions / Discussion - Continued

16:07:00 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

16:07:18 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
(See Exhibit 21)

16:10:03 Milly Allen, LSD

16:10:52 Sen. Dennis Lenz

16:12:58 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
(See Exhibit 21)

16:15:29 Sen. Mike Yakawich

16:16:27 Sen. Dennis Lenz

16:16:36 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

16:16:53 Milly Allen, LSD
(See Exhibit 19)

16:20:46 Sen. Mike Yakawich
(See Exhibit 19)

16:22:09 Sen. Cora Neumann

16:23:05 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
(See Exhibit 19)
16:26:37 Milly Allen, LSD
(See Exhibit 21)
16:27:57 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
16:29:15 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

16:30:00 **Recessed**
16:46:40 **Reconvened**

COMMITTEE WORK SESSION - Continued

16:46:44 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

Forthcoming Agenda Topics

16:47:02 Sen. Mike Yakawich
(See Exhibit 15)

Committee Questions / Discussion

16:50:00 Rep. Melissa Nikolakakos
16:50:22 Sen. Mike Yakawich
16:52:29 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
16:52:39 Sen. Mike Yakawich
16:53:33 Sen. Cora Neumann
16:55:47 Sen. Mike Yakawich
16:57:02 Rep. Melissa Nikolakakos
16:58:12 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
16:59:09 Sen. Mike Yakawich
16:59:48 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
17:00:12 Milly Allen, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
(See Exhibit 17)
17:02:33 Sen. Cora Neumann
17:03:23 Milly Allen, LSD
17:04:10 Sen. Mike Yakawich
17:05:08 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
17:06:56 Sen. Cora Neumann
17:07:45 Vice Presiding Officer SJ Howell
17:09:48 Sen. Dennis Lenz
17:10:54 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart
17:11:08 Rep. George Nikolakakos
17:13:33 Milly Allen, LSD
17:14:19 Sen. Cora Neumann
(See Exhibit 15)
17:15:05 Presiding Officer Jodee Etchart

ADJOURNMENT

Adjournment: 17:15:29