

MINUTES

MONTANA SENATE 59th LEGISLATURE - REGULAR SESSION

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND CLAIMS

Call to Order: By **CHAIRMAN MIKE COONEY**, on March 21, 2005 at
10:00 A.M., in Room 317 Capitol.

ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Sen. Mike Cooney, Chairman (D)
Sen. Keith Bales (R)
Sen. Gregory D. Barkus (R)
Sen. John Brueggeman (R)
Sen. John Cobb (R)
Sen. Steven Gallus (D)
Sen. Ken (Kim) Hansen (D)
Sen. Bob Hawks (D)
Sen. Bob Keenan (R)
Sen. Rick Laible (R)
Sen. Lane L. Larson (D)
Sen. Greg Lind (D)
Sen. Trudi Schmidt (D)
Sen. Corey Stapleton (R)
Sen. Jon Tester (D)
Sen. Dan Weinberg (D)
Sen. Carol Williams (D)

Members Excused: Sen. John Esp (R)
Sen. Don Ryan (D)

Members Absent: None.

Staff Present: Taryn Purdy, Legislative Branch
Prudence Gildroy, Committee Secretary

Please Note. These are summary minutes. Testimony and discussion are paraphrased and condensed.

Committee Business Summary:

Hearing & Date Posted: HB 550, 3/11/2005
Executive Action:

HEARING ON HB 550**Opening Statement by Sponsor:**

REP. JONATHAN WINDY BOY (D), HD 32, Box Elder, opened the hearing on **HB 550**, Fund youth leadership forum for students with disabilities. The mission of the Montana Youth Leadership Forum is to identify students with disabilities who have exhibited leadership skills and then equip them with additional training so they may become leaders by example.

Proponents' Testimony:

June Hermanson, Montana Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF), distributed information to the committee.

EXHIBIT(fcs62a01)

Ms. Hermanson described the MYLF program as a unique leadership training program for high school students with disabilities. The program was started in 1992 in the state of California, in conjunction with the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. Since that time, twenty-three states have been active with the forums. Students learn the history and culture of the disability community and work on plans to achieve their goals. Other leadership programs are not accessible and do not accommodate those with disabilities. She provided written testimony from **Marlene Disburg**, a proponent.

EXHIBIT(fcs62a02)

Sierra Lode presented testimony in favor of the program through her laptop computer speaker. She could not speak or use her hands.

Kayla Legare, Helena, testified about her fear of participation because of her disability. The MYLF taught her she is a person, to be proud of who she is, that she is important and special, and that she can become a leader. She learned how to be in control of her life and become the person she is meant to be.

Scott Flakne, Plentywood, testified he has Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). He works at a group home with people with disabilities. Without MYLF, he did not know what he would be doing right now.

Gene Hermanson testified this is a transitional program that comes at the end of high school when everyone has important decisions in their life. People with disabilities face even more

difficulties. This program provides the resources to make the right decisions. Because of the rural nature of Montana, someone growing up may be the only person in their area with a disability. The MYLF provides a place where they can interact with people with similar situations and challenges and learn how to succeed.

Cayce Eisentraut stated she has cerebral palsy. MYLF changed who she was. At first she did not want to attend. MYLF is a support system that showed her there are people who understand where you come from and who you are. People with disabilities have extreme medical bills, and sometimes it is hard to be able to attend things like this.

Mike Beers attended MYLF in 2001. He was not sure about attending because he had been to other programs with students with disabilities. Those programs tended to be patronizing. MYLF was the first program he had been part of that was a program for people with disabilities taught by people with disabilities. He was able to see people with disabilities that were succeeding in life. He learned about disability culture and history. The program instills pride and a sense of responsibility to continue. He works part time at Summit Independent Living. He had the opportunity to go to Washington D.C. a number of times to advocate on a national level. He has gone back as staff to MYLF every year since he graduated. One of the reasons MYLF is so empowering is the disabled are the largest growing minority in the state. He stated that unemployment among the disabled is 75%. He guaranteed, from what he has seen over the last three years, that if this program continues and more students get involved in this, those numbers will go down.

Carl Schweitzer, Montana Association for the Blind, said **Kayla Legare** is his niece, and they started a business together of braille documents. The first project they did was **SEN. BOB KEENAN'S** menu, and that launched a business for them. MYLF has made a world of difference in her world. He stated full support for this program.

Sarah Ayer, Montana School for the Deaf and Blind, testified her son Nick attended MYLF in its first year. He is deaf and uses sign language to communicate. MYLF helped her son overcome his prejudices toward people with other disabilities, and taught him that he could be a leader. Although he had always been a natural leader and participated in typical leadership activities, he encountered resistance to his presence at some of these events. MYLF helped him to deal with this and overcome these challenges. He is in his fourth year of college at Cal State and has held a variety of leadership positions. Nick would not have had the

confidence or skill to take on these roles without the training he received at MYLF. In her position as a outage consultant for the School for the Deaf and Blind, she sees the difficulties disabled students have achieving their potential and sharing their leadership skills. MYLF is unique in the quality of training it provides. She said MYLF has scrounged for funds for years through grants, donations, and foundations. She asked for funding for the program.

Lindsay Hom, testified she has volunteered for MYLF for two years. She described the changes she has seen in those who attended.

Carolyn Nyquist testified she is a staff member of MYLF. She shared the experience of seeing these children blossom. The program is fast-paced, and when they leave they are ready to do something out in the world.

Opponents' Testimony: None.

Informational Testimony: None.

{Tape: 1; Side: B}

Questions from Committee Members and Responses:

SEN. TRUDY SCHMIDT asked how often this program is held. **Ms. Hermanson** replied it is held once a year for a week in the third week in July. **MS. SCHMIDT** asked where it is located. **Ms. Hermanson** advised, in the past five years, it has been on the campus of MSU Billings. The University made in-kind contributions of their meeting rooms. The staff and the delegates stay in the dorm. All of the staff are volunteers. St. Vincent's Hospital has provided in-kind medical support and equipment. **SEN. SCHMIDT** said the funding is for \$50,000, and she asked if that is what it costs for the week. She wanted to know if they were still accepting in-kind contributions. **Ms. Hermanson** said they will continue to create a public and private partnership. The state would provide some stable funding for the base, but they will continue to work hard to get donations, in-kind contributions, and continue to build a partnership to make sure this program continues. The \$50,000 for each year assists with the cost of the recruitment process and educational training. **SEN. SCHMIDT** inquired about the recruitment. **Ms. Hermanson** replied, in partnership with the Office of Public Instruction, they do a statewide mailing to special education directors, guidance counselors, and high school principals. They ask alumni to recruit in their schools. She reported they struggle with recruitment. **SEN. SCHMIDT** asked how many students

attend the week in July. **Ms. Hermanson** said their budget is designed around twenty students.

SEN. KEN HANSEN noted there are 5,432 students in Special Education in the state. He asked why more are not taking advantage. **Ms. Hermanson** advised one of the barriers is getting information to the students that would be interested. Finding an avenue into the schools to reach those youth has been a real challenge. They brain-stormed with OPI on the various avenues that could be used to get to the students that would be interested. Applications end up on various desks that never make it to the students. The other barrier is the students themselves and the self-esteem of high school students with disabilities. There is a high suicide rate and twice the dropout rate. They just do not try. Those students end up with behavioral problems or in the correctional system. They will continue, through their statewide advisory council, to come up with different avenues to reach those youth. They have 75 alumni.

SEN. JOHN COBB asked what the \$50,000 would cover from now on. **Ms. Hermanson** responded that the program costs more than \$50,000. The \$50,000 would give them a base to keep staff. This will help in recruiting directly in the schools.

SEN. KEITH BALES said this program seems to be filling a void that main-streaming in the education system does not. He asked what about this program gets better response in one week than the education system gets in twelve years. **Ms. Hermanson** believed that MYLF brings people together, allows them to know who they are, and know about their community. As a person with a disability growing up in a rural high school, she was the school joke. That does not enhance the skills one has. The program stresses the right to be fully included in society and schools, and the responsibility to reach their full potential. They learn advocacy skills to advocate for themselves. If they do not know what an accommodation is, they cannot ask for it in the classroom. She believes they find out who they are within their community, and then how their community can help society as a whole.

Mr. Beers commented that part of the reason this program is so successful is, if someone has a physical disability, certain assumptions are made about them and what their abilities are. He had to fight just to get into public school. They put him in a classroom and had him do crossword puzzles all day when his peers were doing something else. If people are told they cannot do things other people do, they start to believe that. When he gives positive reinforcement to students with disabilities, that is often the first time they have heard they can attend college,

etc. MYLF lays out a plan of how to get those things done and people that can help. He would like to see more of this in mainstream schools. **SEN. BALES** said that was a ringing indictment that main-streaming in some ways has worked, but in many ways it is not working. He wondered if there needs to be some money spent within the regular school system as well. **Mr. Beers** agreed there does need to be something done in mainstream schools. Part of what MYLF does is educational, but part of it is students go back to their schools and advocate. He would like to see the history of the Americans with Disabilities Act incorporated into mainstream curriculum so students with disabilities have heroes and students without disabilities have that background too.

SEN. BALES asked **Ms. Hermanson** about plans to get in-kind contributions and the utilization of the \$50,000. **Ms. Hermanson** said they would use the funds to try to provide accommodations for students, for interpreters, and personal assistant services. Transportation is a challenge, because bus routes have been cut. Some students have to fly on Big Sky. They have not put a financial criteria on students. When California set up this model, that was not their intent. They wanted it to be called a youth leadership program. The \$50,000 would help provide a space so they could continue to recruit students and have a program go forward. Each July, they have to start over raising \$100,000 to be able to have the next forum. They have to decide whether to recruit students first, or raise the money and then recruit delegates. They have taken the risk of recruiting first and then hoping the money would come, because the recruitment process has been such a challenge. This money would provide a base so that they know they would go forward for the next two years with base funding. **SEN. BALES** expressed curiosity about specifically including Indian students on Montana reservations in the bill. He asked if they recruit on the reservations the same as anyplace else in the state. **Ms. Hermanson** indicated they have, but there are challenges in regard to communications. This last fall was the first time they had a staff member able to go out into the communities. That is something they have to build on. Last summer they had a delegate from Fort Belknap.

SEN. BALES asked **REP. WINDY BOY** why it was necessary to single that out. **REP. WINDY BOY** said, as a Tribal leader, he did that to encourage the Tribal entities to identify this as a program to encourage the minority of a minority. He would encourage his Tribe to help identify those with disabilities.

SEN. SCHMIDT asked if other states were able to access federal dollars. **Ms. Hermanson** said, not that she was aware of. Funding is an ongoing challenge for all the forums. Iowa gets general

fund dollars out of their state budget for their program. When this started in 1992, the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities provided one-time \$10,000 seed grants to states for start-up. At the federal level, those seed dollars no longer are given.

SEN. BALES said there is a program within DPHHS that is writing grants to something similar. He wondered if a grant could be applied for and written in DPHHS under their current budget. He wondered if there was a way to address this other than legislation. **Ms. Hermanson** said on the state level, there is nothing available in DPHHS. They receive a grant from the Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities, some funding from OPI, and they apply for grants that are available through various entities. They go to foundations and the Billings Breakfast Exchange Club. They had donations from some Kiwanis clubs. Vocational Rehabilitation assisted them with some telephone conference calls. The Independent Living Council has been a significant financial supporter as their budget allows. Typically, at the state and federal level, leadership programs for youth with disabilities are few and far between, and so is funding.

SEN. DAN WEINBERG asked if MYLF has 501(C)(3) status. **Ms. Hermanson** said it does not at the present time. Currently, it is a program of North Central Independent Living Services, Great Falls. The grants they do are submitted through that entity.

{Tape: 2; Side: A}

SEN. WEINBERG thought this funding could set up a 501(C)(3) and pay for a grant writer. That would probably be more stable than state funding. The state budget changes every other year. **Ms. Hermanson** said they have an advisory council that serves on a volunteer basis that represents all of the areas of the state. They meet in conference calls. Oftentimes, grants provide funding for programs but not for personnel. They look for funding sources that allow funding of personnel to be able to do the grant writing or setting up the 501(C)(3). The advisory council has not felt they were ready to do that, and they do not have the manpower to do it. All of the manpower has been spent in recruiting and writing the grants, etc.

SEN. BALES said the state would need a legal entity to contract with. He wondered who the contract would be written with. **Ms. Hermanson** indicated North Central Independent Living Services currently has a contract with the state of Montana through the vocational rehabilitation part of the Disability Services

Division within DPHHS. She had discussions with them and this could be another contract.

CHAIRMAN COONEY asked if this would be a sole source contract or if the Department would be expected to write an RFP. **Ms.**

Hermanson replied the Department could be the pass through entity to the Youth Leadership Forum. **CHAIRMAN COONEY** asked if the North Central Independent Living Services is non-profit, and **Ms.**

Hermanson answered, yes.

Closing by Sponsor:

REP. WINDY BOY mentioned the Tribes operate federal vocational rehabilitation services. This bill was heard in House Appropriations and **CHAIRMAN ROSIE BUZZAS** said there were some identified funds. An amendment to HB 2 would be amenable as well. After two years they will probably come back to the table. If the bill moves forward, the rotation of the program around the state would be encouraged. If the bill moves forward, it will be carried by **SEN. KIM GILLAN**.

ADJOURNMENT

Adjournment: 11:10 A.M.

SEN. MIKE COONEY, Chairman

PRUDENCE GILDROY, Secretary

MC/pg

Additional Exhibits:

EXHIBIT ([fcs62aad0.PDF](#))