

# Minutes of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee

## March 15, 2024

### Room EW20, Capitol, Boise, Idaho



#### **Senator Melissa Wintrow, presiding cochair**

Committee members in attendance were Senators Melissa Wintrow (cochair), C. Scott Grow, Dave Lent, James D. Ruchti, Representatives Douglas T. Pickett (cochair), Jordan Redman, Ilana Rubel, and Steve Berch. Also present were Rakesh Mohan, Director, Office of Performance Evaluations; and Office of Performance Evaluations (OPE) staff.

Audience members in attendance included the following: Angela Lindig, Melissa Vian, and Allison Highley.

Senator Melissa Wintrow called the meeting to order at 12:07 p.m.

#### **Approval of minutes from February 21, 2024 and February 29, 2024**

**Representative Rubel moved to approve the minutes from February 21, 2024 and February 29, 2024. Representative Pickett seconded the motion. It passed by unanimous voice vote without debate.**

#### **Evaluation request presentations**

Senator Wintrow spoke about the evaluation proposal for Luma that was approved during the previous committee meeting on February 29, noting that it is a significant task for the OPE staff. She briefly went over the process of presentation, decision making, and voting on evaluation requests. She told the committee that only two of the six topics could be chosen at the meeting, with a possibility of more requests being accommodated in the summer. Director Mohan recommended that Senator Rabe present first, so she could get to another meeting.

#### **Request: Idaho Land Use Regulation and House Affordability**

Senator Rabe requested a study on how local governments in Idaho use land. There is a shortage of affordable housing in the state and she believes land use regulations might be a contributing factor. The study would look at city and county comprehensive plans and zoning codes to see if they comply with state law and how they affect the availability of housing.

Senator Wintrow asked what her interest is in this study request and what she is trying to accomplish. Senator Rabe explained that she manages a nonprofit focused on preventing homelessness and they see the struggles working families face due to high housing costs. She said land use regulations might be restricting the development of enough housing to meet the

current demand. She hopes a state evaluation will encourage local governments to update their plans and codes to allow for more housing construction.

Senator Ruchti asked if there are other states that address affordable housing through land use studies. Senator Rabe acknowledged all states have guidelines for writing zoning codes but was unaware of any specific studies on the topic.

Representative Berch asked Director Mohan if there could be more specificity in the request. Director Mohan said the office would work with Senator Rabe to develop the scope if the topic is selected. Senator Rabe said that Senator Schroeder also signed the request and he has extensive experience with planning and zoning commissions and could provide guidance on specificity. She said this request would focus on a crosswalk of the criteria of current state code for comprehensive plans and zoning codes with localities' codes and plans.

Representative Berch asked how she would refine or narrow the scope of the project. Senator Rabe said the evaluation could be based on population. She said they would work with OPE to determine the number of cities and counties that could be evaluated. Representative Redman commented on the restrictiveness of other localities and stated he would be interested in this study.

### **Request: Idaho's Residential Care Programs for Children and Youth**

Representative Erickson expressed concern about the treatment of vulnerable young people in residential facilities in Idaho. The requestors were alerted to the issue by media reports about inappropriate restraints, sexual behavior between staff and youth, and a delayed response from the department overseeing these facilities. Representative Erickson said they want to investigate protocols and have recommendations made to improve training, oversight, and overall care for vulnerable youth in these facilities.

Senator Wintrow asked for the big points and questions to be answered by the evaluation. Representative Erickson said he wanted to know why the facilities have not been shut down. He commented on wanting to know more about training protocols, noting they may not be substantial enough for the vulnerable populations needs. He then brought up oversight, including surprise visits and interviews with residents.

Representative Berch asked for an estimate of how many people are served by the facilities. Representative Erickson responded he was not sure but noted that there are many facilities for these programs across Idaho.

### **Request: Idaho Government's COVID Response**

Senator Foreman proposed a comprehensive review of Idaho state government's actions during the COVID-19 pandemic. He discussed the impact of the pandemic on the state, citing numerous deaths and disruptions to daily life. He discussed the importance of learning from this experience to better prepare for future crises. He clarified that the purpose of the investigation is not to assign blame but to understand what happened and identify areas for improvement. He

suggested focusing on potential violations of federal or state laws, with the goal of enhancing preparedness for future emergencies.

Representative Redman expressed his appreciation for the study request and said he would be interested in looking into this project.

### **Request: Veteran Post-Secondary Education Outcomes**

Representative Achilles discussed the trend of military veterans dropping out of Idaho's post-secondary institutions. He highlighted the critical period during the first year after leaving military service when veterans are vulnerable to mental health struggles, including suicide. He brought up the significant veteran population in Idaho and the substantial investment of taxpayer funds in post-secondary education.

Representative Achilles turned his time over to Scott Schmick, a Marine Corps veteran and president of the Student Veterans of America club of CWI. Mr. Schmick shared his personal experience of struggling with the transition to civilian life and witnessing the challenges faced by other veterans. He highlighted the disproportionately high rates of veteran suicide in Idaho and stressed the importance of intervention during the early stages of reacclimating. He discussed the need for Idaho to take a role in addressing this issue and asked for deeper examination of the challenges faced by veterans in higher education.

Senator Grow asked Mr. Schmick for his opinion about the challenges faced by military personnel when transitioning to civilian life. Mr. Schmick highlighted the mental conditioning undergone by military personnel, which can significantly impact their ability to adapt to civilian life. He emphasized that even those who did not directly experience combat can still be affected by military conditioning and the lack of a structured transition process back to civilian life. He cited his own experience of transitioning from deployment to classroom within a short timeframe as an example of the abrupt shift many veterans face.

Representative Berch asked about the division of responsibility between the state and federal levels in resolving the issues discussed. Representative Achilles responded by suggesting that the responsibility for addressing the challenges faced by veterans transitioning to civilian life primarily lies at the state level and indicated minimal overlap between federal and state involvement. He explained that while federal benefits like the GI Bill support veterans initially, the ongoing challenges they face are predominantly a state-level issue, as they affect communities across Idaho.

Senator Lent asked if there are any studies that discuss a correlation between the amount education completed and the suicide rate. Representative Achilles said that the issue is not having an education first and then transitioning to school post-release. Senator Lent noted that the educational process is moving away from traditional higher education models and asked if the current system providing education for veterans is more flexible. Representative Achilles responded that the GI Bill is more flexible, which is why they want to look at post-secondary education specifically.

### **Request: Idahoan Life Expectancy**

Senator Hart requested a study on life expectancy in Idaho, citing multiple sources about recent changes to life expectancy. Representative Berch asked if there is a particular direction for OPE to direct the study. Senator Hart noted they have reached out to the Department of Health and Welfare, Health and Human Services, and Center for Disease Control and received no response. He noted that insurance actuaries or non-traditional sources for information could be pursued.

Representative Berch asked Director Mohan how the rapid growth in population in Idaho would affect the study request. Director Mohan suggested it was a factor to consider but did not know if it would make the study harder to evaluate. He suggested looking at short-term trends and noted that traditional sources must be reviewed.

### **Request: K-12 Funding**

Senator Ward-Engelking requested a study looking at funding equity for K-12 public education, especially in regard to how it is addressed in the Idaho Constitution. She brought up the heavy reliance on levies for schools. She said the study could look at school districts resources, the make-up of students, and deep needs some districts have that others may not.

Senator Lent, a co-sponsor of the study, added that Idaho is entering an accelerated period of evolving public education and highlighted the need for a snapshot in time of the Idaho school systems. He said that the next ten years are critical in public education. Senator Ward-Engelking added that they need data to get there.

Senator Wintrow clarified if they were looking for comparative resources across school districts, to which Senator Ward-Engelking responded yes.

### **Topic Selection**

Director Mohan spoke about the workload of OPE, reemphasizing the Luma study that is currently in progress. He explained the topic selection process. He encouraged members to pick their 3 favorite studies.

Ryan Langrill, Principal Evaluator, counted the votes, showing that there were seven votes for children's residential care, six votes for the veteran post-secondary education, five votes for K-12 funding, and four votes for all other topics.

The committee discussed the top three selections: children's residential care, veteran post-secondary education, and K-12 funding. Representative Berch commented on his criteria for voting, noting that K-12 has the greatest impact for Idaho citizens. Representative Pickett shared his primary concerns about the safety of people's emotional and physical health as affected by state actions or inactions. Senator Grow commented on how seven out of eight members picked residential care and emphasized how big of an issue it is.

**Representative Berch motioned to prioritize the children's residential care and K-12 funding projects. Senator Grow seconded the motion.**

**Representative Pickett proposed a substitute motion prioritizing for the veteran's post-secondary education project alongside children's residential care. This substitute motion was seconded by Representative Redman. The vote on the substitute motion failed.**

**The original motion to prioritize the children's residential care and K-12 funding projects passed by unanimous voice vote without debate.**

Cochair Wintrow noted that the proposal for veteran's post-secondary education could be taken up by OPE should the office have capacity.

Cochair Wintrow adjourned the meeting at 1:13 p.m.