

Minutes of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee
March 16, 1998
Senate Majority Caucus Room, Statehouse
Boise, Idaho

Co-chair Senator Bruce L. Sweeney called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. Committee members Senators Atwell J. Parry, Grant Ipsen and Lin Whitworth, and Representatives Robert C. Geddes, June E. Judd, and Larry C. Watson were in attendance. Representative Bruce Newcomb was excused. Staff members Nancy Van Maren, Ned Parrish, and Catherine Larson were also in attendance.

Co-chair Sweeney asked for a review of the minutes from the February 5, 1998 meeting. **Senator Ipsen moved that the minutes be approved as written. Representative Watson seconded the motion and it passed by unanimous voice vote.**

RELEASE OF BACKGROUND PAPER: IDAHO COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Co-chair Sweeney called upon Nancy Van Maren to review the primary points of the background paper. Ms. Van Maren outlined the concerns about the commission's operations that had been brought to the committee as well as concerns that had arisen in the course of preparing background information for the committee. The issues could be grouped into two primary categories: concerns about the agency's performance, financial operations, and staff morale, and concerns about potential duplication of the agency's function and funding with that of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Co-chair Sweeney called upon each of the three agency heads to comment on the issues included in the background paper. Mike Blackaller, the commission's acting administrator, explained that data collection methods could help explain the apparent decline in services. Also, these services made up only a fraction of all the services the commission provided. Overall, he said, the number of clients requesting services from the commission had been steadily increasing. In terms of potential duplication with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, he said it was most important to ask the consumers what they thought about the services provided.

Kelly Buckland, executive director of the State Independent Living Council (SILC), said the SILC still believed an independent body was needed to evaluate the commission and make recommendations for its improvement. He reserved comment on the consolidation of the two state agencies until his council could discuss it.

Pat Young, interim administrator of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, said that if there were a possibility that a consolidation of services would save state funds, he would support the evaluation. He added that Alaska's combined agency, where he worked for a number of years, worked well.

Co-chair Sweeney then called on Treva Pline, Sr. Accountant with the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, to comment on the issues presented. Ms. Pline said she would welcome an evaluation because she felt there were problems in accounting and financial planning that should be addressed.

Committee members discussed whether to request an evaluation of one set of concerns or both. Committee members felt it was important to determine whether the state had duplicate programs that were using tax dollars inefficiently. Members also expressed concern about the issues surrounding the agency's performance, financial management, and turnover in administrators.

Co-chair Sweeney and Senator Ipsen were excused to attend to other legislative business.

Chairman Parry asked Mr. Buckland if, based on SILC's experience, he was able to say whether blind clients were satisfied with the services they received from the commission. Mr. Buckland said that he had learned through the centers for independent living that some clients had concerns about the services, which was one of the factors leading to his request for the evaluation.

Representative Geddes moved that the Office of Performance Evaluations conduct a full evaluation, continuing its study of all the issues that had come before the committee. Representative Watson seconded the motion. In discussion, Representative Watson said he thought the management and performance concerns would need to be addressed regardless of the potential overlap between the two agencies. Representative Geddes said he thought it would be important for OPE to study both sets of concerns at the same time and present them separately or as one report, depending on how the evaluation progressed. **The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.**

Chairman Parry adjourned the meeting at 1:05 p.m.