

MINUTES
SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, February 18, 2021

TIME: 3:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW54

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Martin, Vice Chairman Riggs, Senators Heider, Lee, Harris, Agenbroad, Zito, Stennett, and Wintrow

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Martin** called the meeting of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee (Committee) to order at 3:10 p.m.

PRESENTATION: **State Response to Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia. Rakesh Mohan**, Director, Office of Performance Evaluations (OPE), introduced himself to the Committee. **Mr. Mohan** thanked the groups and stakeholders who assisted in the preparation of the OPE report on the State Response to Alzheimer's Disease (AD) and Related Dementia.

Sasha O'Connell, Evaluator, OPE, introduced herself to the Committee. **Ms. O'Connell** reported statistics on AD in Idaho and mentioned the impact of AD on caregivers. She advised the Legislature endorsed the Idaho State Plan for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (State Plan) in 2013 to address AD and related dementias, and the OPE was asked to assess the response to the State plan. **Ms. O'Connell** said neighboring states have more robust prevention efforts and stronger system-wide oversight of dementia services.

Ms. O'Connell gave an overview of the OPE's two recommendations: 1.) Develop a dementia program in the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (DHW) Division of Public Health (DPH) to develop early detection and prevention of dementia; and 2.) Develop statutory oversight that clarifies stakeholder responsibility and encourages collaboration in Idaho's prevention response. **Ms. O'Connell** defined dementia and provided information on symptoms. She commented dementia care is very expensive and often results in patients relying on Medicaid for services. **Ms. O'Connell** reported that medical research shows 45 percent of dementia is caused by modifiable risk factors. She said DPH has no employees dedicated to AD and dementia prevention, although AD is a leading cause of death.

Ms. O'Connell mentioned she contacted many Idaho agencies and nonprofit stakeholders, and none with whom she spoke had heard of the 2013 State Plan. She stated that progress on 9 of the 11 initiatives in the State Plan fell far short of expectations. **Ms. O'Connell** advised that no governmental entity is statutorily responsible for overseeing, updating, or executing the State Plan. She gave an overview of neighboring states' approach to addressing AD and dementia issues. **Ms. O'Connell** observed that Idaho's response is fragmented, with tasks split among several agencies. She added that data is maintained in separate databases in Idaho rather than one combined database as is common in other states. **Ms. O'Connell** noted that communication is lacking among stakeholders, and clients are easily confused about whom to contact for various services. She added that there are service gaps in dementia training,

and Idaho has no required number of dementia training hours for assisted living facility staff. **Ms. O'Connell** reported that Medicaid reimbursement rates do not adequately account for the additional time necessary to supervise dementia patients. She recommended the Legislature establish a task force with clearly defined responsibilities to ensure collaboration and ongoing accountability for outcomes. **Ms. O'Connell** stated an AD and dementia coordinator should be placed in the DPH.

DISCUSSION:

Senator Heider said he is concerned there is no one in the DHW to work through these issues and asked why someone is not addressing the identified problems. **Ms. O'Connell** responded that no agency was given the statutory authority or resources to follow through with recommendations.

Senator Heider inquired why there has been no legislation to address the issues at hand. He said it is important to care for older citizens and he is disturbed something hasn't been done. **Senator Heider** asked who has responsibility for starting the necessary legislation. **Mr. Mohan** explained that the OPE only provides information and recommendations to the Legislature, and it is the Legislature's responsibility to take policy actions. He suggested Legislators contact relevant agencies to ascertain necessary steps. **Senator Heider** commented that many Senators would be happy to carry a bill. He noted a perceived lack of concern about the issue.

Senator Harris reported that Senator Bair and DHW Director Dave Jeppesen are aware of the OPE report and worked on proposed legislation. They subsequently decided it would be possible to make some changes without legislation. **Senator Harris** informed the Committee that a coordinator position was added in the DPH to address the OPE's recommendations.

Senator Martin mentioned he was surprised to learn a few years ago that no one at the DHW had responsibility for the State's suicide prevention efforts. He added he only had to ask, and the DHW assigned someone to coordinate tasks, leading to lower suicide numbers.

Senator Wintrow remarked she has learned a lot from the presentation and report, and she is happy to hear the Governor's Office has made some progress. **Senator Wintrow** offered to assist in the coordination effort. She commented that the DHW responds when told of a problem but must strike a balance when advocating for policy actions. **Senator Wintrow** observed that sometimes such actions require a Legislator's involvement. **Mr. Mohan** repeated it is not appropriate for the OPE to initiate legislation, but he is pleased to hear there is interest in the issue.

Senator Stennett mentioned there has been federal funding available for the coordinator position for a couple of years and the structure is in place, but no one was assigned to the position.

Vice Chairman Riggs said the information presented by Mr. Mohan and Ms. O'Connell is in-depth and helpful, but sometimes in-depth information makes it more challenging to find a starting place. He observed it is often beneficial to identify key tasks to begin momentum. **Vice Chairman Riggs** noted the Committee is interested in participating in solutions, and he asked for OPE's assistance in prioritizing actions.

Senator Heider commented if there were the same number of car accidents as there are citizens living with AD, something would have been done by now. He added that he hopes the DHW and Governor's Office are hearing the concerns.

Senator Wintrow noted her background in project management and stated she is happy to do whatever she can to help. She added it is important for society to do a better job caring for senior citizens.

Senator Harris advised that DHW Director Jeppesen and Senator Bair found the system is already in place to add a coordinator to the DPH without the need for new legislation. He said the coordinator will be a good start.

Ms. O'Connell noted the OPE report has a chapter on policy considerations that can assist with identifying important tasks.

Mr. Mohan stated the Legislature took action after the OPE presentation of its report on the Child Welfare System in 2017, and Senator Lee and the Committee were instrumental in helping implement the OPE's recommendations.

Chairman Martin commented he has seen some significant changes in his nine years in the Legislature, particularly with regard to foster care.

**GUBERNATORIAL
REAPPOINTMENT:**

Committee Consideration of the Gubernatorial Reappointment of Carol Mascarenas to the Idaho Board of Environmental Quality (Board), of Idaho Falls, Idaho, to serve a term commencing July 1, 2020 and expiring July 1, 2024. **Ms. Mascarenas** introduced herself to the Committee and gave a brief overview of her background and service on the Board. She remarked that she has served in a number of leadership positions during her 30-year employment at the Idaho National Laboratory. **Ms. Mascarenas** mentioned she has also served as a regulator and a consultant, and these experiences allow her to bring a unique perspective to the Board.

Senator Lee thanked Ms. Mascarenas for her willingness to continue her Board service. She asked if Ms. Mascarenas has encountered any conflicts of interest during her time on the Board. **Ms. Mascarenas** replied that she has never been required to recuse herself from a Board decision.

Senator Harris inquired about future challenges for the Board and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. **Ms. Mascarenas** answered that Idaho's population growth adds pressure to air quality, water quality, and waste issues. She stated that creative solutions will be required in the future to avoid burdening businesses and other sole source generators.

Chairman Martin announced the Committee would vote on the reappointment at its next meeting.

**PAGE
GRADUATION:**

Curtis Keddington gave an overview of his experience as a Senate Page. **Mr. Keddington** said he has gained knowledge that gives him an advantage over other students who did not have the opportunity.

Chairman Martin asked how Mr. Keddington's Senate experience differed from his expectations. **Mr. Keddington** replied that he thought there would be more bickering, and he was surprised at the level of civility.

Senator Stennett thanked Mr. Keddington for his work and inquired about his plans after high school graduation. **Mr. Keddington** responded that he intends to serve a two-year church mission and then study sports journalism or sports broadcasting in college. He added he has not yet decided on a college.

Senator Lee commended Mr. Keddington for his good service to the Committee. She suggested that Mr. Keddington attend Brigham Young University. **Senator Lee** asked about Mr. Keddington's most memorable moment serving as a page. **Mr. Keddington** advised his family is a fan of the University of Utah. He added his favorite moment was the opportunity to talk with various people and get outside his comfort zone.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Martin** adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m.

Senator Martin
Chair

Jeanne Jackson-Heim
Secretary