

MINUTES
SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE

DATE: Tuesday, March 19, 2019

TIME: 2:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW54

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Martin, Vice Chairman Souza, Senators Heider, Harris, Bayer, Jordan, and Nelson

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senators Lee and Burtenshaw

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 2:05 p.m.

GUBERNATORIAL APPOINTMENT HEARING: **Chairman Martin** welcomed B.J. Stinger, under consideration for appointment to the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Commission). **Mr. Stinger** is from Pocatello, Idaho, and is currently pursuing a master's degree at Idaho State University. He suffers a rare, genetic degenerative ocular disease. His family has a long relationship with the Commission, going back to 1969 when his grandfather attended the Commission's Assessment and Training program. **Mr. Stinger** shared that he attended the program six years ago and would now like to help other Idahoans who are blind and visually impaired.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Jordan** inquired how Mr. Stinger's perception of the Commission might have been influenced after attending their training program. **Mr. Stinger** stated he found it extremely beneficial and was inspired to join the Commission after attending the program.

Chairman Martin asked Mr. Stinger what he felt he would bring to the Commission. **Mr. Stinger** responded that he has been told that he is very personable, willing to do whatever he can to help, and he is very diligent in his pursuit of an objective.

Senator Heider wondered how Mr. Stinger might help an Idaho employer understand that candidates with visual impairment are productive and dependable, and how he would approach them to bring these candidates on board. **Mr. Stinger** explained that the Commission has regional offices that approach potential employers and offer to provide a presentation. Employers can also reach out to the Commission for information, which includes information about adaptive equipment.

Chairman Martin thanked Mr. Stinger and notified the Committee that the vote to recommend confirmation would occur as the last order of business in today's meeting.

PRESENTATION: **Director David Jeppesen**, Department of Health and Welfare (Department), presented a status update on the improvement plan for the Southwest Idaho Treatment Center (SWITC). **Director Jeppesen** assured the Committee that this issue continues to be a top priority and he has begun weekly status meetings to review progress. The advisory group has met twice since the Department's first presentation to this Committee in early February.

Director Jeppesen presented his update in three categories: the facility, long-term systemic issues, and the land that the facility sits on. The current facility is stable and improving. The plan is constantly being updated as they consult with experts. There has been some progress in staffing with pay increases and the implementation of a workweek that consists of four, 10-hour shifts, and improvement in staffing ratios. Increased staffing has allowed them to keep clients engaged in sports and enrichment activities. Clients engaged in structured activity are less likely to engage in maladaptive behavior and more likely to learn behaviors that would allow them to move back into a community setting. A recreational therapist will be hired to define and lead those activities. Investigations into potential abuse or neglect are improving. The investigator recently received certification and a new, senior investigator will be hired. The Department meets monthly with Adult Protective Services. There is one board-certified behavioral analyst and one other on staff that is pursuing board certification. **Director Jeppesen** emphasized that client treatment and safety is the highest priority and the Department will continue to evaluate the facility itself to make necessary changes.

Director Jeppesen discussed system level issues that are much broader than just the facility issues, stating that previously the Department had been trying to solve the problem with the wrong solution. The issues require a step back to take a broad, wholistic look at how the Department manages these clients. Questions under consideration by the advisory board include: what is the purpose of SWITC; what is the Department's role, responsibility and authority; what is the right treatment model for this population that does not fit the community placement model; and what is the appropriate facility design and licensing, and should it be run by the State or privately run. The advisory board includes families of SWITC clients, law enforcement, the courts, community partners, legislators, and others. Senator Nelson visited the facility and is now a member of the advisory board. **Director Jeppesen** reported that he expects to see recommendations from the advisory board to be submitted to him for consideration by June, 2019, so that when the Legislature reconvenes next year, the Department will be prepared to introduce recommended statute changes, policy improvements, and budget recommendations, to transform the model of care that serves this vulnerable population.

Director Jeppesen reported that the facility sits on 600 acres owned by the Department. It houses SWITC, a community re-entry center under the Department of Corrections, a Department of Juvenile Corrections facility, a Job Corps facility, and is the future site of an adolescent behavioral health facility. The city of Nampa also has two golf courses on the property. Since his first report to this Committee, Director Jeppesen has met with the Mayor of Nampa, engaged a professional firm to conduct a re-valuation of the property, met with developers to discuss potential use of the property, and met with Senator Jordan to share ideas. **Director Jeppesen** stated that he intends to pull together the current valuation along with options, and will meet with the Governor's Office near the end of April to discuss those options.

DISCUSSION:

Senator Jordan expressed concern over the current SWITC clients given the potential to transition the property, since these clients reside there because there are no community placement options for them. **Director Jeppesen** assured Senator Jordan that the client's best interest is paramount in any decision. The short-term plan is to use the current model that allows them to be reintroduced into community options, while ensuring that long-term, they will have a place for treatment. Many of these clients sit between community services and the correctional system. The current model is not working, but changes will not be made at the expense of the clients.

Senator Harris inquired if the advisory committee was considering improvements to the buildings themselves. **Director Jeppesen** stated that the plan is to design a new facility around whatever treatment model they develop. The current facility was built for a different purpose, in a different time, and significantly contributes to the problems encountered

Chairman Martin asked the Director to address staff safety. **Director Jeppesen** stated that the inadequate facility is a big part of the issue. He reported that improvements include training, and a key-card system for room access to provide a level of staff safety. Having higher staffing levels contributes to safety as well. He is waiting for statistics still being compiled, but emphasized that reducing injury risk will be challenging until the move into a new facility. **Chairman Martin** requested the annual budget for the current population of 17 clients. **Director Jeppesen** reported that it is approximately \$11.5 million annually. The majority of the program is federally funded, with some state funding from the General Fund.

**GUBERNATORIAL
APPOINTMENT
MOTION:**

Senator Nelson moved to send the Gubernatorial appointment of B.J. Stinger to the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired to the floor with recommendation that he be confirmed by the Senate. **Senator Heider** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

ADJOURNED:

There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Martin** adjourned the meeting at 2:25 p.m.

Senator Martin
Chair

Margaret Major
Secretary