

**MINUTES OF THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS**

**Eighty-first Session  
March 22, 2021**

The Senate Committee on Government Affairs was called to order by Chair Marilyn Dondero Loop at 4:24 p.m. on Monday, March 22, 2021, Online. [Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda. All exhibits are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau.

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Senator Marilyn Dondero Loop, Chair  
Senator James Ohrenschall, Vice Chair  
Senator Dina Neal  
Senator Pete Goicoechea  
Senator Ira Hansen

**GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:**

Senator Melanie Scheible, Senatorial District No. 9

**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Alysa Keller, Policy Analyst  
Heidi Chlarson, Counsel  
Suzanne Efford, Committee Secretary

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Erik Jimenez, Chair, Advisory Committee on Minority Health and Equity, Office of Minority Health and Equity, Department of Health and Human Services  
André Wade, Director, Silver State Equality  
Doralee Martinez, Nevada Disability Peer Action Coalition  
Daniel Corona, Mayor, West Wendover  
Beth Handler, Deputy Director, Programs, Department of Health and Human Services

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

We will open the hearing on Senate Bill (S.B.) 222.

**SENATE BILL 222**: Revises provisions relating to governmental administration.  
(BDR 18-245)

SENATOR MELANIE SCHEIBLE (Senatorial District No. 9):

Senate Bill 222 establishes diversity liaisons within government, commissions and boards. The purpose of the diversity liaison is to ensure that minority communities are being considered thoughtfully when we make policy and implement policy changes. Whether it is members of the community who have different abilities or belong to racial, ethnic or sexual minorities; every time a commission, a board or a State agency reviews or thinks about changing practices, we will ensure it reaches out to those communities.

ERIK JIMENEZ (Chair, Advisory Committee on Minority Health and Equity, Office of Minority Health and Equity, Department of Health and Human Services):

Senate Bill 222 is one of the bills that came out of Governor Steve Sisolak's proclamation that racism has become a public health crisis because of the things we witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Assembly Bill No. 264 of the 80th Session requires State agencies to designate tribal liaisons to ensure that our 27 tribes always have a seat at the table when decisions are made at the State level.

Thus far in its infancy, that program has been successful. The Nevada Indian Commission has done a lot of good work to ensure that agencies are collaborating and working to meet the tribes' needs.

Considering that framework during the Covid-19 crisis, we thought about how we could expand that concept to make sure all of the State's minority communities are represented and heard. Broadly speaking, S.B. 222 will continue this work and operationalize Senator Spearman's Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 5 and Governor Sisolak's proclamation to start breaking down some of the structural barriers people in disadvantaged communities face every day.

**SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 5**: Urges certain action to address the public health crisis in Nevada. (BDR R-966)

The Advisory Committee on Minority Health and Equity worked for months to get feedback on this bill. We talked to communities everywhere. This bill is the result of those conversations.

Some State agencies are already doing this work. This bill formalizes that process and encourages State agencies to work together. If we just implement cultural competency or if only one agency at a time is reaching out, this State, as an entity itself, is not meeting the needs of minority communities to the best of its ability.

This bill will foster interagency collaboration to include improving language access to ensure that all Nevadans can communicate and interact with their government and improving ADA accessibility for those with disabilities. When an agency launches a new program or when new funding comes into the State, we want to make sure that we are meeting people where they are and the organizations that serve them to get feedback on those programs.

We have submitted a proposed amendment ([Exhibit B](#)) we worked on with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Commission on Minority Affairs and the Office for New Americans. This proposed amendment will limit the potential fiscal impact and do some good work.

Sections 4 through 8 of the proposed amendment, page 1, [Exhibit B](#), contain definitions mirrored from existing language in statute. Therefore, some of this language is old. We wanted to conform this bill to the language already in *Nevada Revised Statutes* (NRS) 232. Minority groups under those definitions include ethnic and racial minorities, people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ community.

Section 9, page 1, [Exhibit B](#), states that State agencies shall make a reasonable effort to collaborate with minority groups in developing policies and programs that directly affect people from those communities. This is important because as we saw with Covid-19 when doing small businesses and rental assistance, decisions were often made in a room in Carson City that affected populations not in Carson City. It is important to reach out to those communities to get feedback to the extent possible.

Senate Bill 222 would ensure that programs and services offered by the State agency are inclusive of minority groups. The State has struggled with ADA

accessibility and with how to increase access and participation. This bill could be a useful tool.

As demographics change in the State, it is important to make sure, when resources are available, agencies offer information about their services in multiple languages.

Section 10, page 2, [Exhibit B](#), requires State agencies that predominantly serve people in minority communities to designate a liaison who is responsible for the things previously mentioned, namely providing technical assistance to the agency designed to increase access for people in minority communities. It also requires State agencies to work collaboratively with liaisons from other State agencies to develop plans and recommend to the Legislature better ways to serve the people of this State.

Section 11, page 2, [Exhibit B](#), states that agencies should make the contact information of their liaison available and distribute that information to the three agencies that work specifically with minority communities.

Section 12, page 2, [Exhibit B](#), requires the Office of Minority Health and Equity (OMHE), the Commission on Minority Affairs and the Office for New Americans to work together to organize an annual meeting between the liaisons to discuss ways to increase access and inclusivity, work toward eliminating systemic racism and tear down some of those structures that have led to discrimination across the State. It is important that this does not live and die, but the meetings keep happening when different Legislatures and Governors are in place to continue to make life easier for people in these communities.

SENATOR OHRENSCHALL:

The definition in section 4 includes a group of persons with disabilities. If this bill passes, will the OMHE expand its role in advocating for persons with disabilities, or is this something it has already been doing?

MR. JIMENEZ:

The OMHE is already working with these defined groups. This would not expand the role of the OMHE. Some other legislation was introduced today that would potentially do that, but that is not the intent of this bill.

SENATOR NEAL:

I understand the goals of this bill; however, my concern is that the OMHE has been underfunded since 2005. I am trying to determine how we are going to fund these efforts and collaborations. I know what the Governor said, but the dollars are not following what has been stated as the movement on racism.

MR. JIMENEZ:

You are correct and your point is well taken. The OMHE has one person with grant-funded staff, the Office of New Americans has two people and the Commission on Minority Affairs has one or two people. The intent of the proposed amendment is to try to spread the work around so that not only one person is focused on doing reports.

It is important that these groups are engaged in this work every day. That is why it is important to take a step like this. Would you like to work with us on how we encourage other agencies to get to the table while the Legislature discusses funding? That is not a conversation for me. We are trying to move forward on how to get every State agency committed to working in minority communities and meeting people where they are.

SENATOR NEAL:

The Commission on Minority Affairs has an ombudsman, but the majority of the members of the Commission are volunteers from the community who do not get paid. This is just an effort on their part. How do you envision this collaboration working?

I understand the concept. There is power in numbers. In much of this bill you talk about merging duties. I did not see "shall" in the bill. As long as the language is permissive, I do not see this happening unless it is a mandated activity which then creates a fiscal note.

MR. JIMENEZ:

Language in the bill states that someone shall designate a diversity and inclusion liaison and that those liaisons shall participate in the meeting. We are walking a delicate balance. I know as well as you do that we have finite resources; however, with the resources we have we should be doing everything we can to at least keep the conversation going.

If you want to talk about long-term funding for the OMHE or any of the other agencies, I am happy to join you in those conversations. We are trying to do the best we can with the resources available.

CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

In section 9, you mentioned a reasonable effort to collaborate. Would you please define reasonable?

MR. JIMENEZ:

We are trying to clarify the roles and responsibilities of State agencies. State agencies are defined in NRS 232. There was no declaration that agencies should make an effort to reach out to members of minority groups. The term "reasonable," and I would be happy to work with you if it should be stronger or weaker, addresses things like ADA accessibility or language access plans which are expensive. I am cognizant of the realities of the situation. I am not proposing that each agency needs to provide these expensive services. However, we should start this conversation, have the framework in place and at least create the table and the space in which these conversations can happen on a Statewide basis. Then we can come back, review the recommendations in section 12 of the proposed amendment, page 2, [Exhibit B](#), and determine if we can do more permanent actions.

ANDRÉ WADE (Director, Silver State Equality):

Silver State Equality supports S.B. 222. Regarding Senator Neal's concerns about funding and capacity, we had these same conversations. We see this bill as a viable option as a workaround in the interim to lessen the impact of the work on the OMHE given its limited staff.

We see this collaborative effort as being a way to increase the OMHE's reach into these different minority communities to help further the work we hope to accomplish over the coming years.

DORALEE MARTINEZ (Nevada Disability Peer Action Coalition):

The Nevada Disability Peer Action Coalition supports S.B. 222. We are people of different disabilities.

I am totally blind. I was reading the bill on the LCB website. As you know, parts of the bill are bolded, in italics or in different colors. As a blind individual who cannot see colors, my phone reads to me but it does not tell me when a word is

in italics or in a different color. I called the Legislative Counsel Bureau to have someone read to me and describe what has been deleted and what has been amended. They were not able to help because they are busy with other things. What Mr. Jimenez and Senator Scheible are doing is awesome because it gives people with disabilities someone to call. There will be a designated place or office to call to become a well-informed and active member of the community. This is a good step forward so people with disabilities can make an impact and show you what works for us. What works for me as a blind person may not work for a person who is dyslexic or in the autism spectrum or has different learning disabilities.

DANIEL CORONA (Mayor, West Wendover):

I strongly support S.B. 222. West Wendover is one of those rare majority-minority communities in rural Nevada. That is part of the reason why I support this bill.

Senate Bill 222 will help give communities like mine a seat at the table and help break down barriers to access that and ultimately make government more effective and accessible for all Nevadans, especially those for whom government does not always work efficiently.

I also work for a local nonprofit. We are constantly trying to put people in touch with different State agencies. It would be a great help if we were able to point to a liaison who is fluent in Spanish who could help my constituents access the services they need. Senate Bill 222 gives us a name and an agency to call to have direct access to assist our people in getting the help they need.

BETH HANDLER (Deputy Director, Programs, Department of Health and Human Services):

Senate Bill 222 aligns with the mission of the DHHS and the OMHE which is to improve access to and the quality of healthcare services for members of minority groups, including Black, Indigenous and people of color, people who are differently abled and in the sexual orientation and gender identity community.

The OMHE mission is to disseminate information and educate the public on matters concerning healthcare issues. We also have access to Health in All Policies, which is a worldwide approach aligned with much of the language in this bill. It engages communities and state agencies in discussions about

minority health issues and involvement at the inception of a project or policy. That is a part of our system's change.

We had a fiscal note on the bill for the OMHE because we want to be aggressive about building the capacity of that office and funding it. But based on the amended language and the possibility of accessing the resources, staffing and expertise of all agencies and departments involved, we can move forward with having an annual meeting, probably through Zoom. We will not be looking at travel for everyone or doing major coordination requiring extensive facilitation. We can develop the annual report electronically through collaboration with the diversity liaisons across all of the State agencies.

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CHAIR DONDERO LOOP:

Having no further business to come before the Senate Committee on Government Affairs, we are adjourned at 5:26 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

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Suzanne Efford,  
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

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Senator Marilyn Dondero Loop, Chair

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

EXHIBIT SUMMARY				
Bill	Exhibit Letter	Begins on Page	Witness / Entity	Description
	A	1		Agenda
S.B. 222	B	1	Erik Jimenez / Advisory Committee on Minority Health and Equity	Proposed Amendment