

**GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND REHABILITATION  
OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

Centennial Hall  
Juneau, Alaska  
September 27, 2006

**PUBLIC TESTIMONY**

19                                -oOo-

20                    MS. STRATTON: Can I get your name,

21 please, for our record.

22                    MS. REIERSON: This is Joy

23 R-e-i-e-r-s-o-n.

24                    MS. ELSTAD: Thank you, very much. If

25 you would like to give some testimony, the committee

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1 is all here and would like to hear your comments.

2                    MS. REIERSON: Well, basically I don't

3 know where I'd be without Voc Rehab. They went far

4 beyond what I ever imagined. They bought my hearing

5 aids. I went to AVI. We ended up going twice. I had

6 a son that was in a bad car accident and they were

7 good enough to pay for another, I can't remember, five

8 months, and because of that I was able to get a job at  
9 the Forest Service, and it just one thing led to  
10 another. Now I'm working for the Marine Highway and I  
11 believe it all started because Voc Rehab was making  
12 that commitment to me. And I just am really thankful.  
13 And it seemed like it was a long road. I think it was  
14 like seven years, actually. They helped me with one  
15 thing or another, and I just really appreciate all the  
16 time and effort they put in to helping me get where I  
17 am. I never imagined I would be here. And I'm going  
18 to be 53, and it was a really late start, but it was  
19 encouraging to know that it's never too late.

20 MS. ELSTAD: Great, well thank you, Joy,  
21 for your comments. We have you down on record now.

22 MS. REIERSON: Okay, thank you. Bye.

23 MR. BOYNTON: Where was she from, madam  
24 chair?

25 MS. ELSTAD: I believe she was from

1 Juneau.

2 MS. STRATTON: We've got some public

3 testimony we received in written form, and Teri is  
4 going to read one of them into the record.

5 MS. BURKE: Malcolm J. Miller from  
6 Haida -- a Haida carver, Petersburg, Alaska. A dream  
7 come true. My birth name is Malcolm J. Miller and I'm  
8 known to many as J. I am from the Haida descendant  
9 born and raised -- I'm from the Haida, descendant born  
10 and raised in Haines, Alaska. My parents passed away  
11 when I was a young child. I had a yearning to learn  
12 engraving as a youngster. One of the Native elders  
13 encouraged me to learn engraving as I stood beside him  
14 watching him engrave jewelry. As I grew older that  
15 word of encouragement became my foundation to become a  
16 Haida engraver.

17 In 1988 I suffered a heart attack and  
18 had bypass surgery in 1993. It was at this time the  
19 advice of my doctor was to change careers -- on the  
20 advice of my doctor to change careers. It was  
21 difficult advice to follow because I had been fishing  
22 for over 40 years and owned a boat, the JUDY K a  
23 gillnet troller.

24 It was frustrating making a career  
25 change at my age. I was over 50 years old at the

1 time. Fortunately I saved my money from fishing and  
2 invested in tools, supplies and equipment to practice  
3 engraving. I attended workshops offered in and out of  
4 state, paid for my own tuition and used airline miles  
5 for transportation.

6 I sought advice, learning new techniques  
7 from mentors such as artists Louis Minard, Dave  
8 Galanin, I hope I'm saying that right, Wayne Price and  
9 Jon Rowan. They were willing to provide me with  
10 information on designs, art, use of materials, et  
11 cetera. I'm indebted to them for sharing their  
12 thoughts, ideas, hands-on approach and techniques on  
13 Native Art. The skills I have learned I'm ready to  
14 pass on and some day I will give someone the  
15 opportunity to learn. I have been active in teaching  
16 youths at the high school during the art fair,  
17 donating jewelry to raise funds for charitable causes.

18 I was told you're never too old to

19 learn. With that advice it has instilled in me to  
20 always learn, talk to artists, attend workshops. I'm  
21 never too old to learn. With my wife Mary's degree in  
22 business administration and my artistic skill, we  
23 began the business Dawn Eagle Engraving and I began  
24 producing jewelry that was profitable. Prior to that  
25 all my friends were wearing jewelry that I had made

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1 them, free of charge.

2           Petersburg has two very rich cultures.  
3 Tlingit and Norwegians. I became the first Native  
4 retailer in Petersburg that produced hand made  
5 jewelry. My advertising was mostly by word of mouth.  
6 Customers stopped by to hear Native legend and  
7 purchased hand-signed jewelry. I was told that was  
8 the highest of their -- the highlight of their travel.

9           I yearned to talk to other artists and  
10 listen to their suggestions. Then one day I became  
11 acquainted with Terry McDonald. I met Terry over 30

12 years ago as a fisherman. He specialized in  
13 woodworking media with Native designs. As we became  
14 reacquainted, and since I had no blood family in this  
15 area, I adopted Terry into my Haida tribe. We now  
16 collaborate on Haida designs and are producing  
17 paddles, game boards. He does the wood carving and I  
18 engrave on metal media the designs applied to the wood  
19 carvings. One of our collaborations is on display  
20 outside Senator Stedman's Juneau office.

21 My wife and I moved to Petersburg with  
22 the idea of opening up a small retail shop and studio.  
23 We bought a duplex on a commercial lot and used one  
24 apartment for my work area and retail space. At a  
25 garage sale we purchased a used rotating jewelry case

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1 to display bracelets, earrings and pendants. My work  
2 space and retail area was in the living room section  
3 of the apartment.

4 We began researching and found that

5 Tlingit and Haida had a program to assist tribal  
6 members with disabilities. I began applying for  
7 grants and they assisted me with tuition and air  
8 travel for out of state to attend workshops on  
9 engraving. I also applied for a grant through the  
10 same agency and received assistance to improve my work  
11 and sales area. I now a studio where I can work  
12 comfortably and a retail area so I can display the  
13 jewelry attractively.

14           Sometimes as I burn the midnight oil  
15 making jewelry I think about how my skills and  
16 business developed. I am grateful to the Native elder  
17 for his words of encouragement. To the mentors I came  
18 in contact with that helped me with the designs. To  
19 my wife for her insistence and persistence, you can do  
20 it, you can make jewelry with Native designs, look at  
21 your skills. To Native organizations that believed in  
22 me to further my education in engraving. To my  
23 adopted cousin Terry for developing a rapport that  
24 continued on to become a valuable friend. To the  
25 satisfied customers walking away with a piece of my

1 jewelry and pleased with the artwork that I have  
2 learned to develop. My dream has come true. Malcolm  
3 J. Miller. Haida carver, Petersburg, Alaska.

4 MS. ELSTAD: Thank you.

5 MS. STRATTON: We have another piece of  
6 written testimony that is anonymous. Name withheld.  
7 It's a letter of appreciation to whom it may concern.

8 I have been a client of the Division of  
9 Vocational Rehabilitation since 1990 because I have  
10 multiple disabilities.

11 When I came to DVR seeking assistance I  
12 was so ill and did not even have the energy and  
13 motivation to get out of bed. I had to force myself  
14 to get out of bed and go to the orientation meeting  
15 that was scheduled for me.

16 Although I had years of work experience  
17 in the accounting field, I lacked self confidence, was  
18 shy about meeting new people, was offended about being  
19 criticized and was embarrassed about asking for help  
20 as a result of my illnesses.



21           The Division of Vocational  
22   Rehabilitation listened to my doctors, they requested  
23   prescriptions to support their treatment for me. They  
24   helped me afford treatment for my chronic pain and my  
25   body and the self confidence I was lacking.

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1           It has been more than ten years since I  
2   have worked and my skills are outdated. I need to get  
3   more up to date training. Now I am able to take  
4   classes at UAS to upgrade my skills in accounting. My  
5   DVR counselor advocated for me to receive reasonable  
6   accommodations while I'm at school.

7           When someone is at my age going back to  
8   work is tough. The services that I have received have  
9   help me stand up for myself and be confident. I enjoy  
10   my young classmates. They get me excited and I get to  
11   make new friends.

12           I'm thankful that I have the opportunity  
13   to be a client of my DVR counselor because she

14 understands me so well. I am improving because I have  
15 been with DVR and the services that I have received  
16 from DVR have made me realize that I still have hope  
17 in a place of employment. The staff listens to my  
18 concerns and tries to help me, too. They never get  
19 tired of me coming to see my counselor over and over  
20 again because they always welcome me back with a  
21 smile. I'm glad DVR is here to help people like me  
22 who are in need of help to get back to work. If you  
23 have any questions or concerns, please contact my DVR  
24 counselor Kay Smith at 465-8930. Sincerely name  
25 withheld.

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1 MS. ELSTAD: Would you like to check the  
2 line. Is there anybody else on line that's joined us  
3 that would like to provide testimony to the Governor's  
4 Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People  
5 with Disabilities?

6 MR. NODER: I would.

7 MS. ELSTAD: Can I have your name,  
8 please.

9 MR. NODER: Sure. My name is Lawrence  
10 Noder, N-o-d-e-r.

11 MS. ELSTAD: Thank you, Lawrence. You  
12 can go ahead and provide your testimony now.

13 MR. NODER: I've been dealing with  
14 Margie Thompson through the DVR office, and Margie has  
15 been very helpful to me. I went to her with an idea,  
16 and Margie put it together along with some other  
17 people, in consultation with other people, and formed  
18 a business plan, in the form that the committee would  
19 understand and approve of. Had it not been for  
20 Margie's abilities, I wouldn't have been able to do  
21 that. She has always been responsive to my questions  
22 and needs and I think that the best way to improve DVR  
23 is to clone Margie. And I can't really think of  
24 anything else to say other than the fact that I owe  
25 her an enormous amount. We are quite a ways along in

1 the completion of my grant, and if it hadn't been for  
2 Margie, I'd still be standing on the sidewalk with my  
3 fingers -- with my hands in my pockets whistling.  
4 Margie is a super person.

5 And I thank the whole department for  
6 what they have done in my benefit. I'm sorry I didn't  
7 have opportunity to write this out, and that there are  
8 so many ums and ahs and all that, but I'm sure you're  
9 getting the message.

10 MS. STRATTON: We are getting the  
11 message and we appreciate your time and effort to call  
12 in.

13 MR. NODER: Well, it's something that I  
14 can do for Margie because she's done so much for me.  
15 I'm very grateful to her, and the rest of the  
16 department as well. So I guess that's all I have to  
17 say.

18 MS. STRATTON: Thank you.

19 MR. NODER: You're welcome, bye now.

20 MS. STRATTON: Nancy Brown, would you  
21 like to come up front.

22 MS BROWN: Well, I'm Nancy Brown. And

23 it's hard for anybody to succeed in the workplace, and  
24 it's especially hard if you're deaf, like me. So I  
25 have a long standing relationship with Voc Rehab that

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1 goes back to when my hearing deteriorated to the point  
2 where I couldn't work anymore. I had to give up my  
3 job as a news reporter, and Vocational Rehab helped  
4 retrain me and then they hired me where I worked for  
5 five years as a vocational rehab assistant. They had  
6 faith in me and they gave me the chance to get that  
7 experience, despite my hearing impairment.

8 Well, just last March I received a  
9 cochlear implant which changed my life, and Voc Rehab  
10 came into the picture and helped me finance that.  
11 That's a very expensive procedure which I would not be  
12 able to do on my own. So I have a lot of deep  
13 appreciation for Vocational Rehab that they helped me  
14 so much in my life, that I wouldn't be in the  
15 workplace, I would be a dropout. It's a life saver

16 for people, and I thank Vocational Rehab for helping  
17 me stay in the workplace.

18 MS. STRATTON: We don't have anybody  
19 else right now, so we'll just wait and see if someone  
20 else comes to give testimony.

21 MS. REDAHL: I was here to give  
22 testimony, actually. I'm Kathleen Redahl (ph) and I'm  
23 a vocational rehab client from Ketchikan, Alaska. I  
24 was -- I had a severe injury in my back, I was laid up  
25 and not able to walk for quite some time. I just had

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1 a surgery when my husband died unexpectedly leaving me  
2 with not many places to turn to. I had decided  
3 because my previous work experience had all been  
4 physical labor, that I had to change my life and that  
5 I would attend college and get a degree so that I  
6 could work with my mind instead of my back for a  
7 while.

8 Encouragement is hard to find. People

9 kind of get used to you being where you are, and I got  
10 a lot of encouragement to stay disabled and very  
11 little to improve my life.

12 I found the workers at Vocational  
13 Rehabilitation to be amazingly encouraging. They  
14 believed in me. They told me I could overcome my  
15 difficulties in pain, that I could make something of  
16 my life and take care of my child. It was a very long  
17 process, and I needed all the encouragement I could  
18 get.

19 Alice Rocke in particular was quite  
20 supportive. She knew things about me that I was  
21 shocked that she paid that much attention to me. I  
22 would come in the office and she would say, I see you  
23 made the dean's list, or, I see that you're now on  
24 student government, things that weren't case related  
25 that showed that she had a personal interest in me.

1 I don't think I would be where I am now.

2 A happy worker without the encouragement and support  
3 of DVR.

4 I really didn't want a handout, I wanted  
5 a hand up. It really makes a difference to be able to  
6 earn your own money, to make your own way through  
7 life, and this division is so essential to the  
8 self-esteem of people, not just the economic benefits  
9 of having people work and not receiving money, but for  
10 the individual growth and for the community at large.  
11 I'm very appreciative, and I'm glad to be able to come  
12 in and speak my heart today. Thank you.

13 MS. STRATTON: Do we have someone on  
14 line who joined us for public testimony?

15 MR. LYBARGER: Yes.

16 MS. STRATTON: Could you give us your  
17 name.

18 MR. LYBARGER: Charles, the last name is  
19 L-y-b-a-r-g-e-r, Lybarger. My name is Charles  
20 Lybarger, and I'm a 48-year-old long time Alaskan  
21 married with one grown child. I've spent about 25  
22 years in construction, the last 15 years as a cabinet  
23 maker with most of that time spent right here in  
24 Juneau. I took great pride over the years



25 consistently presenting a very professional attitude

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1 and extremely high quality of work, unfortunately I  
2 developed a chronic job-related repetitive injury in  
3 both arms which progressed to the point where I  
4 realized that I soon could no longer work in my chosen  
5 profession. I was forced to look for a different  
6 occupation which would not require the heavy  
7 hand-related physical labor, but where I could  
8 continue to provide a high standard of service and  
9 bring in a reasonable income.

10           After exploring many different  
11 possibilities and seeking a lot of service -- a lot of  
12 advice, I'm sorry, I chose to retrain for employment  
13 in the information technologies field, specifically as  
14 a network administrator. I managed to get through the  
15 first two years of schooling on my own while  
16 continuing in the cabinet trade. At that point,  
17 however, I lost my ability to bring in an income as

18 the injuries had progressed to the extent that I was  
19 forced to permanently resign from my old trade.

20 My doctor restricted me to sedentary  
21 work level, a job class for which I had no experience  
22 or training to offer, at least until I could finish  
23 school. Although I had filed for workman's  
24 compensation, the product of an insurance company  
25 retained by my employers for workers' compensation

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1 coverage, was not cooperating.

2 My wife also has a long-term disability  
3 which prevents her from maintaining consistent  
4 employment. And we soon found ourselves with very  
5 little to live on, much less continue my retraining.  
6 I either had to find some outside assistance or drop  
7 out of school, at least temporarily. The catch was I  
8 needed the schooling to qualify for a reasonable job  
9 placement. At that juncture my advisor at UAS  
10 recommended I contact DVR. I did so, went through the

11 orientation and set up an initial appointment. After  
12 review of my situation I was found eligible for  
13 assistance and reemployment plan was developed around  
14 my continuing education.

15 Financial assistance through DVR enabled  
16 me to continue with my schooling through the end of my  
17 junior year. It took 11 long months, but my workman's  
18 compensation insurer agreed to pay for my last year at  
19 UAS.

20 To bring things up to date, I've just  
21 recently finished a very successful and encouraging  
22 three month summer internship with the department of  
23 management information systems at the city and borough  
24 of Juneau. I'm currently enrolled full time at UAS  
25 and plan to graduate next May with a Bachelor's degree

1 in information systems. I have excellent grades.

2 I now have some references and work  
3 experiences related to my new occupation and job

4 prospects as well that look very promising. The  
5 bottom line in this current context is that the staff  
6 at the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation were able  
7 and willing to provide the level of assistance I  
8 needed right when it was most crucial, that I receive  
9 it.

10           It is very humbling to have to ask for  
11 aid, but they made it a very positive experience.

12 Warmest regards, Charles Lybarger. Dated today,  
13 9/27/06.

14           MS. STRATTON: Thank you very much.

15           MR. LYBARGER: You're very welcome.

16           MS. STRATTON: Jim Swanson.

17           MR. SWANSON: Hello, my name is Jim  
18 Swanson, I'm here in Juneau, I work at the Juneau  
19 branch office with the Division of Vocational  
20 Rehabilitation. I'm just here to say thank you for  
21 having me work for Alice Rocke, totally appreciate  
22 that. She has always been a role model, a great  
23 co-worker to me, and I had the utmost respect for her  
24 in the work that she's done for all the individuals  
25 with disabilities.

1           She worked very hard up to about a week  
2 before she passed away, and everything she did was for  
3 the people that she worked with. So thank you again  
4 for the award that you guys have done in memory of  
5 Alice. Thanks.

6           MS. STRATTON: We have some more,  
7 additional written testimony.

8           MS. BURKE: Dated September 25th, 2006.  
9 To the Governor's Committee on Employment and  
10 Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities from Monica  
11 Brandner, president. I'm not sure what she's  
12 president of, I think it's president of Image by M.  
13 Brandner.

14           First of all, I must apologize that I  
15 will be unable to attend the public testimony in  
16 person. I must start off by acknowledging the  
17 following people who were instrumental in my  
18 retraining. Mr. Jim Swanson, Mr. Danny Lakip, Ms. Lin  
19 Davis, and Ms. Linda Miller, employment counselor, for

20 her encouragement and beautiful smile every time I  
21 came to Vocational Rehabilitation for meetings.

22           It is because of your retraining program  
23 that I am able to pursue a career path that I thought  
24 I would never be able to obtain. The financial  
25 assistance you so graciously gave enabled me to

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1 receive my certification in the image and etiquette  
2 industry.

3           I not only received financial  
4 assistance, but encouragement and a "we believe in  
5 you" attitude. I have been so impressed with the  
6 Juneau Job Center network staff and Alaska Department  
7 of Labor staff. They are caring, considerate and  
8 compassionate. These attributes were a much needed  
9 anchor during what could have been a tumultuous time  
10 in my life. You're a life ring not only to me but to  
11 my entire family.

12           Thank you Juneau Job Center for

13 believing in me, for keeping me on track, and most of  
14 all for allowing me to chase my dreams and make them a  
15 reality. My promise to you is that with my retraining  
16 I will impact the building blocks of kindness and  
17 respect to Alaskan's children and youth. I'm  
18 committed to our children and will do whatever I can  
19 to impact their lives and do whatever I can to be a  
20 positive influence to their lives. Your investment in  
21 me has given me the opportunity to invest in others  
22 and I am so grateful.

23 Thank you from the bottom of my heart,  
24 it has truly been a pleasure working with all of you.  
25 Monica Brandner.

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1 How come I don't get any applause?

2 MS. ELSTAD: Is there anyone else who  
3 has joined us on line that would like to testify? Not  
4 yet.

5 MS. STRATTON: Okay, we've got another

6 individual who would like to give us some testimony.

7           ABBY FOCHT: Yeah, my name is Abby, and

8 I first started seeking services from DVR December of

9 last year. I was in a relatively new employment

10 situation that was turning out to be a little more --

11 a little over my head, a little more challenging than

12 I thought it would be. And I had the additional

13 challenge of a brain injury that I sustained in my car

14 wreck in '99 and a very challenging supervisor to work

15 for, and things weren't going well at all and I

16 couldn't -- I'm not the kind of person that would -- I

17 believe in myself in terms of just making things work

18 out and stuff, but I realized that I needed help with

19 the situation.

20           And so then I went to DVR and sought

21 services for finding something, a new employment

22 situation that would be suitable and less challenging.

23 So I started working with Vanessa Stevenson over at

24 DVR and she quickly got me a contact with Liza

25 Paramore, and that began my involvement with them, and



1 it was very rewarding and very helpful.

2 Liza did a profile for me in terms of  
3 what I was good at and interests and stuff, and it  
4 really helped boost my confidence in terms for that  
5 kind of stuff, because I'd been brought down by my  
6 previous employment situation that I was coming out of  
7 and making me feel better, too, in regards to my  
8 abilities in relation to the injury.

9 So we -- yeah, I went out there almost  
10 every day and I had got help on my resume and redoing  
11 that and that was really good, highlighted things,  
12 highlighted my skills, things I was good at and just  
13 put it in a better format, and just come to apply for  
14 jobs.

15 I went after state jobs since I  
16 previously had one, and a large health history, so  
17 health insurance was important to me. So I really  
18 stuck to that to getting a state job. And, yeah, it  
19 was great, too, because with DVR they identified  
20 services that I needed, that I didn't necessarily  
21 think that I needed, but turned out I did, such as

22 counseling and, you know, help with like Liza, here,  
23 someone to talk to and to get going with certain  
24 things. And counseling, I think I mentioned.  
25           And counseling kind of turned another

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1 corner for me, which is something I'm still doing,  
2 which has just changed my life for the better. And  
3 the counselor that I was seeing recommended this  
4 biofeedback for me, and I've had multiple head  
5 injuries in my life, and this biofeedback is a  
6 treatment I'm still doing twice a week, and that's  
7 just revolutionized things in the way I function and  
8 the way I think and just life in general.

9           Yeah, so it's been a wonderful  
10 experience working with DVR, working with DVR. They  
11 were with me the whole way and checked in with me  
12 before closing my case and making sure that things  
13 were stable and stuff and very supportive of my  
14 interest and endeavors, including some I haven't

15 pursued yet with the possibility of going back to  
16 school, because my car wreck happened when I was in  
17 the middle of college and I haven't been able to  
18 finish since. So yeah, very supportive with me the  
19 whole way, and I know they will be. So very good  
20 experience. And very helpful and provided all the  
21 services that I needed.

22 MS. STRATTON: Thank you, we appreciate  
23 your time and effort to come.

24 MS. DIEBELS-PARAMORE: Well, you know  
25 what, Abby has been so lovely to come in and tell what

1 worked well with her at DVR, but she failed to toot  
2 her own horn, and she's currently employed full time  
3 with --

4 ABBY FOCHT: Alaska State Archives.

5 MS. DIEBELS-PARAMORE: And they are  
6 delighted having her on their team. We've heard that  
7 from several different sources, and it's been nice for

8 Abby.

9           ABBY FOCHT: Live and work downtown,  
10 walk to work, it's great.

11           MS. BURKE: Got your life back.

12           ABBY FOCHT: Got kind of a life I've  
13 never had. There was some growing up in those early  
14 years that I didn't ask for, and it happened, and now  
15 I feel like things are in place and balanced enough  
16 that I can actually relax and enjoy and get on with  
17 it. So I don't have the challenges and whatnot of  
18 before. And health had been good. I'm keeping my  
19 fingers crossed for the past few years. So hopefully  
20 that remains so. No surgeries or unexpected brain  
21 tumors.

22           MS. ELSTAD: Is there anyone else that  
23 has joined us on line that would like to testify  
24 today?

25           MS. STRATTON: No one, and it's 5:00 so

1 we are adjourned until tomorrow morning at 8:30.

2 (Meeting adjourned)