

***Alaska State Senate***  
***Senator Forrest Dunbar***

**Session:**

Alaska State Capitol  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
(907) 465-6944



**Interim:**

1500 W. Benson Blvd.  
Anchorage, Alaska 99503  
(907) 269-0246

**Proudly Serving Senate District J**

*Mountain View | Airport Heights | Russian Jack | U-Med | Campbell Park*

**SPONSOR STATEMENT**

***SB 45: MEDICAID MENTAL HEALTH PARITY***

SB 45 MEDICAID MENTAL HEALTH PARITY calls on the Department of Health to give more equal consideration to mental health conditions and substance use disorders under the state Medicaid plan.

Although a 2008 federal law mandates equal treatment of mental and physical health by group health plans and health insurance issuers, Alaska is exempt as a fee-for-service state. Currently, individuals on Alaska Medicaid plans face lengthy timelines for accessing mental health services, and their providers have a heavier paperwork burden than comparable providers working on physical health issues. For example, state Medicaid users often must justify treatment beyond a set number of visits for serious chronic mental health conditions, like schizophrenia or major depression. Those treatment limits are less complicated or nonexistent when it comes to receiving care for chronic conditions like diabetes.

Added burden for justifying behavioral health care discourages people from treatment, often worsening chronic conditions, and increasing reliance on high-cost emergency care. This approach to care is unsustainable.

With over 250,000 Alaskans enrolled in Medicaid as of September 2024, passage of this bill would lead to a significant increase in behavioral health treatment statewide, reducing inequities in care and eliminating archaic regulations that no longer fit our current understanding of mental health treatment best practices.