



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of  
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

P.O. Box 110693  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0693  
Main: 907.465.3250  
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March 21, 2019

Senator Scott Kawasaki  
Alaska State Capitol, Room 7  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0001

Subject: ACoA Letter of Support, SB 10

Dear Senator Kawasaki:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer support for SB 10, to extend the "Statewide Suicide Prevention Council" to June 30, 2027. Alaska has one of the highest rates of suicide in the U.S., and among older Alaskans specifically, there is a high rate of suicide. According to 2017 data from the Alaska Bureau of Health Analytics and Vital Records, Alaska's age-adjusted suicide rate for people age 65+ is 27.3, twenty-five percent higher than the age-adjusted suicide rates for older Americans at 19.7. Nationally, elderly white men have the highest risk of suicide with a rate of 32 suicides per 100,000 each year, using firearms as the most common means to complete this act (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016). Although older adults attempt suicide less often than those in other age groups, they have a higher completion rate.

The higher rate of senior suicide in Alaska parallels the higher risk of suicide among younger Alaskans. While reasons for the higher rates of suicide among Alaskan seniors are not completely known, there is some evidence to suggest that colder, darker northern climates are more conducive to depression, which is one of the leading causes of suicide. Depression in older people often goes untreated as it may be more difficult for seniors to access behavioral health care in many Alaskan communities while others view depression as a "normal part of aging." In addition, Alaskans age 65+ self-report higher rates of binge drinking, obesity, and frequent mental distress than seniors in the lower 48. These behavioral health conditions may contribute to depression and the higher rates of senior suicide in Alaska (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey).

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council created a Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan, 2018-2022 that is intended to be custom-fit to each community and group. Strategy 2.7 of the Suicide Prevention Plan recommends that senior service providers should become familiar with the warning signs of suicide as well as risk factors for suicide such as substance abuse, violence, and depression. Senior centers and other senior service settings offer a primary environment for seniors to address those conditions and feelings, as well as their feelings about suicide. Strategy 3.7 of that plan recommends the state and communities participate in efforts to de-stigmatize suicide and improve access to treatment in order to prevent mental health crises. Seniors do not always access behavioral health services that are provided in community settings and are more likely than younger individuals to live in isolation and choose not to seek help.

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council is working towards breaking the silence and stigma surrounding the problem of suicide in Alaska that are contributing to suicide and preventing people from accessing the help they need. This work needs to continue to effect change and turn the curve in Alaska. The Commission supports the work of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council and appreciates your leadership on SB 10.

Sincerely,

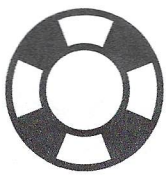


Gordon Glaser  
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello  
ACoA Executive Director



**American  
Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention**

Alaska Chapter  
2440 E Tudor Rd. #191  
Anchorage, AK 99507

**Alaska Board of  
Directors:**

Board Officers:

Dennis Lasley  
Chairperson  
Anchorage Police Dept.

Ann Applebee, Treasurer  
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Wendy Fick  
Matson Navigation

Kim Isada  
Community Volunteer

20 March 2019

The Honorable Senator Kawasaki  
State Capitol Building  
120 4th St. , Room 111  
Juneau, AK, 99801

RE: **SB 10** (Kawasaki)/**HB 22** (Tarr)

Dear Senator Kawasaki:

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is pleased to write you in support of SB 10/HB 22, to extend the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council until 2027. Established in 2001, the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council has served as an advisory council to the Legislature and Governor regarding suicide awareness and prevention. In 2018, the council released an updated 2018-2022 state plan, *Recasting the Net: Promoting wellness to prevent suicide in Alaska*.

The council serves the public interest by actively broadening the public's awareness of suicide prevention and coordinating the efforts of other suicide prevention entities including state agencies, regional groups, coalitions, and local communities. Overall suicide ranks as the fifth leading cause of death in Alaska, it is the first leading cause of death among residents ages 15-24 and the second leading cause of death among those 25-34. We must continue to let the council advise us on this public health problem and coordinate efforts across the state to save lives.

Please support SB 10/HB 22

Dennis Lasley  
Board Chair  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
Anchorage, AK 99515  
Ph: 907.250.1890  
Email: Alaska@afsp.org

**AFSP Mission:**  
*To save lives and bring hope  
to those affected by suicide.*



# American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

## AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION – ALASKA CHAPTER

March 7, 2019

Senator Kawasaki  
State Capitol Room 7  
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: **SB 10** (Kawasaki)/**HB 22** (Tarr)

Dear Senator Kawasaki:

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention – Alaska Chapter is pleased to write you in support of SB 10/HB 22, to extend the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council until 2027. Established in 2001, the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council has served as an advisory council to the Legislature and Governor regarding suicide awareness and prevention. In 2018, the council released an updated 2018-2022 state plan, *Recasting the Net: Promoting wellness to prevent suicide in Alaska*.

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This Chapter of the American Foundation supports SB 10/HB 22

Sincerely,

James Biela  
POB 3543  
Bethel, AK 99559  
Lead Ambassador/Suicide Survivor Outreach Coordinator/  
National Public Policy board member



February 15, 2019

[Sent Via Email]

Andrew Jimmie, Chairman  
Alaska Native Health Board  
4000 Ambassador Drive  
Anchorage, Alaska 99508

Re: Support the continuation of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council and the addition of a Tribal Health Representative

Dear Mr. Jimmie:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), I am sending this letter to support the Alaska Native Health Board's (ANHB) efforts to amend SB 10 "An Act extending the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; and providing for an effective date," through the addition of a representative to be nominated by ANHB and its Tribal Behavioral Health Directors Committee. Suicide prevention, education, and awareness have been priorities of AFN for many years. AFN representative William Martin serves as a Vice Chair for the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC). We fully support the continuation of the SSPC and the work of ANHB.

AFN is the largest statewide Native organization in Alaska. Our membership includes all 12 regional for-profit corporations, all 12 regional non-profit organizations, 171 for-profit village corporations, 191 federally recognized tribes, and several tribal consortia that contract and compact to run federal and state programs. Our mission is to enhance and promote the cultural, economic and political voice of the entire Alaska Native community. AFN serves as the principle forum and voice of the Alaska Native community in dealing with critical issues of public policy and government.

Alaska Natives and American Indians are the only ethnic population specifically listed as at-risk for suicide by SAMHSA. Since suicide disproportionately affects Alaska Natives and American Indians, AFN supports ANHB's efforts to add a seat to the SSPC to include a subject matter expert in prevention who has program experience in the tribal health system. The individual's knowledge and experience would add tremendous value to the work of the SSPC. Suicide is preventable, and an additional tribal representative on the SSPC would be a critical resource in providing a unique perspective to promote resiliency and raise awareness.

Should you require more information about this information, please contact me directly at (907) 274-3611.

Sincerely,

Julie Kitka  
President



February 6, 2019

The Honorable Senator Kawasaki  
Alaska State Senate

Dear Senator Kawasaki:

On behalf of the Alaska Peace Officers Association (APOA), I am writing to convey our support of SB10, "An Act extending the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; and providing for an effective date."

The APOA wholeheartedly supports the extension of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council. As first responders, members of APOA see firsthand the devastation of suicide. SB10 extends the term of the council and allows its valuable work to continue. Please contact the APOA office in Anchorage at 277-0515 if there is anything our organization can do to help with the passage of this bill. Thank you for your commitment and dedication to our state.

Sincerely,

Mark S. Pearson  
State President  
Alaska Peace Officers Association

PO Box 240106  
Anchorage, AK 99524  
[apoa@gci.net](mailto:apoa@gci.net)  
(907)277-0515

*About APOA*

*The Alaska Peace Officers Association (APOA) is a dynamic, professional and non-partisan organization. Our membership consists of law enforcement, corrections, prosecutors, security professionals and others at the local, state and federal levels. APOA has served as a voice for peace officers and issues impacting the law enforcement profession for over half a century. We are one of the oldest and largest 501c(3) charitable, nonprofit organizations in Alaska. [www.apoaonline.org](http://www.apoaonline.org)*



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

## Department of Health and Social Services

Governor's Council on Disabilities  
& Special Education

**Anchorage**  
3601 C Street, Suite 740  
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-5923  
Main: 907.269.8990  
Fax: 907.269.8995

March 25, 2019

Senator Scott Kawasaki  
Alaska State Capitol, Room 7  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Kawasaki

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the "Council") fills a variety of federal and state roles, including serving as the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act. As the state DD Council, the Council works with Senior and Disabilities Services (SDS) and other state agencies to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families receive the services and supports that they need, as well as participate in the planning and design of those services.

We partner with other boards and commissions all the time, and have been very supportive of the great work that Suicide Prevention Council has done to bring awareness, support and hope to Alaskans on this very difficult issue. Therefore, the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education wishes to offer support for HB 22, to extend the "Statewide Suicide Prevention Council" to June 30, 2027. As you are aware, Alaska has a very high suicide rate and it affects all segments of our population, including those who experience intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families. The Council stands ready to assist in the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council to increase outreach and awareness to our beneficiaries. The Council itself lost one of its valued employees to suicide four years ago and our entire staff and members mourn her loss deeply.

Thank you for taking the lead to extend the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council for ten more years.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Maggie Winston in black ink.

Maggie Winston, Chair

Handwritten signature of Patrick Reinhart in black ink.

Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director



February 25, 2019

Dear Legislators,

The Juneau Suicide Prevention Coalition is writing in strong support of House Bill 22 to extend the State Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC) until June 30, 2027. It is critical that the important work of the SSPC be reauthorized and funded throughout this time period.

The suicide rate in Alaska continues to be extremely high. In 2017, Alaska's suicide rate was the second highest in the country. The problem of suicide continues to escalate in our state; our suicide rate increased by 13% in the period from 2012 to 2017. Suicide is the leading cause of death among Alaskans ages 10 to 64, and the sixth leading cause of death overall in our state. Given the severity and magnitude of suicide in Alaska, it is essential that our state continue to dedicate resources to support suicide prevention strategies.

The SSPC has been an excellent resource to help guide statewide suicide prevention efforts, including those efforts by our Coalition in Juneau over the past ten years. The recently revised "State of Alaska Suicide Prevention Plan" 2018-2022, "Recasting the Net – Promoting Wellness to Prevent Suicide in Alaska" provides a framework for suicide prevention from the individual to community to statewide levels. Council members come from a cross-section of our population to ensure representation of different perspectives. The statewide prevention summits the State Council has co-sponsored were especially valuable for building relationships between our widespread communities and fostering collaboration and resource sharing.

Suicide is a complex public health problem. The SSPC has been instrumental in fostering communication to break the silence and stigma surrounding the difficult social problems contributing to suicide and preventing people in distress from receiving the help they need. There are many challenges and much work ahead. The SSPC has built a solid foundation for continuing and expanding the good work of Alaskan communities to find the best ways to nurture healthy citizens who value life and can be part of a healthy Alaska. Please continue to authorize and fund the State Suicide Prevention Council.

Respectfully,

Jorden Nigro  
Chair, Juneau Suicide Prevention Coalition





National Alliance on Mental Illness

**nami**

**Alaska**

February 27, 2019

Alaska State Legislature

Re: Letter of support for SB 10 and HB 22, extending the “sunset” date for the Alaska Statewide Suicide Prevention Council.

To Whom It May Concern:

NAMI (the National Alliance on Mental Illness), is the largest grass-roots organization in the country providing education and advocacy for families affected by mental illness. NAMI Alaska is the Alaska state chapter of NAMI. There are nearly 1,000 local NAMI affiliates, nationwide, of which four are in Alaska: NAMI Anchorage, NAMI Fairbanks, NAMI Juneau, and NAMI North Slope. These are volunteer-centered organizations providing classes and support for families impacted by mental illness.

NAMI Alaska supports SB 10 and HB 22, which would extend the “sunset” date of the Alaska Statewide Suicide Prevention Council to 2027.

Alaska, tragically, leads the nation in rates of suicide. We must do what we can to reduce the horrific toll suicide takes on Alaskan families. Suicide is preventable. “Treat the mental illness; prevent the suicide.” Like most illnesses, the earlier mental illness is diagnosed and treated, the better the outcome.

Information, and access to resources prevent suicide. The Alaska Statewide Suicide Prevention Council is an inexpensive and effective way to reduce Alaska’s rate of suicide. Extending the sunset date – keeping the Council from having to close its doors – is essentially free. Please support these bills. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sheila Harris  
Executive Director  
NAMI Alaska