



THE STATE  
*of* **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

**Department of  
Health and Social Services**

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

Anchorage  
3601 C Street, Suite 902  
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-5923  
Main: 907.269.7800  
Fax: 907.269.0060

Juneau  
350 Main Street, Suite 404  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1149  
Main: 907.465.3030  
Fax: 907.465.3068

January 22, 2018

The Honorable Cathy Giessel  
Alaska Senate, Room 427  
Alaska State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Giessel:

Thank you for sponsoring Senate Bill 128 to establish a marijuana prevention, education and treatment fund. The Department of Health and Social Services is pleased to support this legislation and stands ready to assist you in facilitating its passage into law.

As you are aware, several states that legalized marijuana have recognized the importance of having a concurrent effort to keep the public informed about the potential health impacts of legalization. Oregon, Colorado, Washington, California, and Massachusetts all have established funds for education, abuse prevention and treatment purposes. Alaska needs to be counted among these states. Without this funding, our state lacks the capacity to create evidence-based public health education, prevention, and treatment programming. Without this effort, we would be concerned that the messages the public, particularly young people, receive about marijuana are only that it is legal and represents a potential economic boon to the state—ignoring the significant health and safety concerns expected to arise from the increased availability of marijuana products.

It is especially critical that Alaska monitor use and knowledge about marijuana during these first years of legalized use—to inform the public of the specifics of the law and potential health effects as they begin to use these new products, and to provide resources to prevent and treat potentially harmful exposures. Use of marijuana at an early age and for long periods of time may lead to serious problems related to brain development, addiction, mental health, learning challenges, and

dropping out of school. Marijuana use during pregnancy and breastfeeding is also a concern. How is usage changing with legalization? The Department's Division of Public Health, with its resources and experience in analyzing such trends, will bring important information to bear on the public policies needed under legalization. Our Division of Behavioral Health and Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention will also be valuable resources in this effort.

The Department is eager to work with you to pass this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Valerie Nurr'araaluk Davidson', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Valerie Nurr'araaluk Davidson