

**Alaska Mental Health Board
Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse
431 N. Franklin St. Suite 200
Juneau, Alaska, 99801**



February 19, 2016

Representative Wes Keller
Alaska Capitol Room 403
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: HB 102 – Education in Residential Psychiatric Treatment Centers

Dear Representative Keller,

The Alaska Mental Health Board and Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse have followed the discussion related to the quality, accessibility, and appropriateness of the education being provided to youth admitted to residential psychiatric treatment. We are extremely concerned that students with such severe disabilities are apparently not receiving the education to which they are entitled under the Alaska Constitution and federal law. We support finding a solution to address this situation as quickly as possible, with the primary focus being on the educational needs of our young constituents.

It is our understanding that the educational experience of students receiving residential psychiatric care varies from school district to school district. Given that youth experiencing severe mental health disorders must go to an urban center (Juneau, Anchorage, Fairbanks) for residential treatment, it is imperative that parents, students, and school districts be able to rely on consistent expectations and obligations statewide – especially for youth who will eventually transition back to their home school district after treatment. HB 102 provides that consistency.

Providing a mechanism by which access to equal educational opportunities, regardless of disability, is guaranteed for all Alaska children is imperative. We appreciate the House Education Committee sponsoring a bill to help resolve this disparity, and look forward to an ongoing conversation about how best to provide for the educational needs of disabled students statewide.

Sincerely,

J. Kate Burkhart
Executive Director

**Alaska Mental Health Board
Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse
431 N. Franklin St. Suite 200
Juneau, Alaska, 99801**



February 19, 2016

Senator Cathy Giessel
Alaska Capitol Room 427
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: SB 103 – Education in Residential Psychiatric Treatment Centers

Dear Senator Giessel,

The Alaska Mental Health Board and Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse have followed the discussion related to the quality, accessibility, and appropriateness of the education being provided to youth admitted to residential psychiatric treatment. We are extremely concerned that students with such severe disabilities are apparently not receiving the education to which they are entitled under the Alaska Constitution and federal law. We support finding a solution to address this situation as quickly as possible, with the primary focus being on the educational needs of our young constituents.

It is our understanding that the educational experience of students receiving residential psychiatric care varies from school district to school district. Given that youth experiencing severe mental health disorders must go to an urban center (Juneau, Anchorage, Fairbanks) for residential treatment, it is imperative that parents, students, and school districts be able to rely on consistent expectations and obligations statewide – especially for youth who will eventually transition back to their home school district after treatment. SB 103 provides that consistency.

Providing a mechanism by which access to equal educational opportunities, regardless of disability, is guaranteed for all Alaska children is imperative. We appreciate your sponsoring a bill to help resolve this disparity, and look forward to an ongoing conversation about how best to provide for the educational needs of disabled students statewide.

Sincerely,

J. Kate Burkhart
Executive Director