



Crisis Intervention Advocacy Education Prevention

March 27, 2018

Dear Legislators:

STAR is in full support of SB169, critical legislation to reduce barriers to mental health care so desperately needed throughout our state. The existing state regulation requiring the presence of a supervising *psychiatrist on site at a mental health clinic 30% of the time in order to bill Medicaid* has resulted in unnecessary backlogs and waiting lists of up to a year in Anchorage and longer elsewhere in rural parts of the state.

This waiting list applies to victims of sexual assault and abuse trauma, both children and adults. Crime victim compensation is an option to those who reported the crime(s) to police, but can still take months to apply benefits, while survivors are asked to pay for services out of pocket. It is unconscionable to make those suffering wait for needed services, while the trauma impacts continue unabated and permeate their entire lives.

The far ranging impacts of trauma can worsen dramatically without intervention. Trauma responses to sexual assault include developing anxiety disorders, fear of public spaces, panic attacks, depression and losing a sense of one's self. These responses can and do cause survivors to miss work or school, fear moving around in the world, and can spiral to loss of employment, dropping out of school, losing their home, and becoming homeless. Ultimately, depression can lead to suicidal ideation and loss of life. With proper intervention and trauma therapy, individuals can be supported in their healing process and learn de-escalation and coping strategies to help recognize and manage their trauma responses.

SB169 effectively manages the supervisory mandate by allowing a physician (not just a psychiatrist) to supervise mental health providers either in person or by communication device. Utilizing modern technology in medicine, especially in such a geographically sparse state like Alaska, is crucial to expanding critical access to - and reducing unnecessary barriers for - behavioral health care to Alaskans.

Please pass SB169 to ensure behavioral health care access to all Alaska residents.

Sincerely,

Keeley Olson
Executive Director

STAR's mission is to provide quality crisis intervention, education and advocacy services to victims of sexual assault, sexual abuse, their families and our community.

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