



Alaska Native Health Board

THE VOICE OF ALASKA TRIBAL HEALTH SINCE 1968

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ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

ALEUTIAN PRIBILOF
ISLANDS ASSOCIATION

ARCTIC SLOPE
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

BRISTOL BAY AREA
HEALTH CORPORATION

CHICKALOON VILLAGE
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

CHUGACHMIUT

COPPER RIVER
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

COUNCIL OF ATHABASCAN
TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS

EASTERN ALEUTIAN TRIBES

KARLUK IRA
TRIBAL COUNCIL

KENAITZE INDIAN TRIBE

KETCHIKAN
INDIAN COMMUNITY

KODIAK AREA
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

MANILAQ ASSOCIATION

METLAKATLA INDIAN
COMMUNITY

MT. SANFORD
TRIBAL CONSORTIUM

NATIVE VILLAGE
OF EKLUTNA

NATIVE VILLAGE OF EYAK

NATIVE VILLAGE
OF TYONEK

NINILCHIK
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

NORTON SOUND
HEALTH CORPORATION

SELDOVIA VILLAGE TRIBE

SOUTHCENTRAL
FOUNDATION

SOUTHEAST ALASKA REGIONAL
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

TANANA CHIEFS CONFERENCE

YAKUTAT TLINGIT TRIBE

YUKON-KUSKOKWIM
HEALTH CORPORATION

VALDEZ NATIVE TRIBE

Honorable Cathy Giessel
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau AK, 99801

Re: Support for Senate Bill 169 Medicaid: Behavioral Health Coverage

Dear Senator Giessel,

Established in 1968, Alaska Native Health Board (ANHB) serves as the statewide voice on Alaska Native health issues. ANHB is a 28-member tribal organization representing tribes and tribal organizations carrying out health services on behalf of the 229 federally recognized Tribes in Alaska, and works on behalf of over 168,000 Alaska Native People. ANHB's purpose is to promote the spiritual, physical, mental, social and cultural well-being and pride of Alaska Native people. As the statewide tribal health advocacy organization, ANHB assists tribal partners, state and federal agencies with achieving effective communication and consultation with tribes and their tribal health programs.

On behalf of ANHB, we are writing to support Senate Bill 169 Medicaid: Behavioral Health Coverage. Alaska suffers some of the greatest behavioral health challenges of any State. Alaska has amongst the highest rates of suicide, domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse and more with communities spread over 660,000 square miles. The Health Resources & Services Administration has designated all of rural Alaska as a Mental Health - Health Professional Shortage Area. Alaska already faces challenges as a health care provider shortage designated area, expanding the limited (specific) requirement to have a "psychiatrist" to the more inclusive "physician" will help remove a barrier to access to care.

Alaska has been innovative in seeking solutions to such challenges and instituting Telehealth approaches early on. The current and limiting requirements, however, that require a psychiatrist be on the premises and onsite at least 30% of the time, serves as an unnecessary barrier and limits access to care given Alaska's unique challenges and the desperate need.

ANHB supports removing barriers to care and instituting approaches that maximize current available capacity by making the provider type more inclusive. ANHB recognizes the benefits of this more integrative approach will allow the filling of gaps to care and support comprehensive approaches. SB 169 promises to accomplish this and we thank you for your leadership sponsoring this bill.

Sincerely,

Verné Boerner
ANHB President and CEO