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February 10, 2022

Honorable Senator Bert Stedman
Co-Chair, Senate Finance Committee
State Capitol Room 518
Juneau, AK 99801

Honorable Senator Click Bishop
Co-Chair, Senate Finance Committee
State Capitol Room 516
Juneau, AK 99801

Electronic Letter

RE: Providence Alaska Supports Senate Bill 80: PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Dear Senators Stedman and Bishop:

Providence Alaska has set the standard for modern health care in Alaska for more than 100 years. Today we remain the state's largest health care and behavioral health provider, and the largest private employer, with nearly 5,000 caregivers across Alaska. As the CEO and the Regional Director of Behavioral Health for Providence Alaska, we write in support of Senate Bill 80.

Expanding access to behavioral health services is a priority of our organization and we work to promote access to care, educate and train the next generation of health care workers, and to fill critical gaps in the overall continuum of care.

Promoting mental health is as equally important and crucial as physical health. Incorporating mental health into the public school curriculum can help provide the tools and language to identify and understand mental health struggles. Mental health education in schools can significantly improve students current and future mental health by eliminating stigma and fostering resiliency.

Providence Alaska pledges our collaboration to develop guidelines for instruction in mental health in consultation with the Board of Education and Early Development and the other representatives from mental health and tribal health organizations included in the legislative intent section of SB 80. Thank you for the opportunity to share our support of SB 80. This legislation can help young Alaskans and their families feel more comfortable seeking help, and most importantly, save lives.



Preston M. Simmons, DSc. FACHE
Chief Executives
Providence Alaska



Renee Rafferty, MS, LPC
Regional Director of Behavioral Health
Services
Providence Alaska

Cc: Sen. Elvi Gray-Jackson
Tom Chard, Alaska Behavioral Health Association
Jared Kosin, Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association