



February 6, 2026

To: The Senate Labor & Commerce Committee

Re: **Support for Senate Bill 196:** Strengthening Alaska's Behavioral Health Crisis System

NAMI Alaska strongly supports Senate Bill 196 which would establish a behavioral health crisis services surcharge to provide sustainable funding for Alaska's *Crisis Now* framework and the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

As part of our 2026 legislative priorities, we continue to advocate for strengthening crisis intervention resources across Alaska. SB 196 offers a crucial and predictable funding stream that will help ensure Alaskans in crisis receive timely, appropriate, and life-saving care.

At a time when our state faces ongoing reductions in behavioral health funding—and continues to experience some of the highest suicide and opioid-related death rates in the nation—this legislation is a vital step forward. 988 saves lives!

The flexibility in SB 196 allows communities to:

- Expand mobile crisis response teams
- Fund 988 call center operations statewide
- Establish and enhance stabilization centers
- Support culturally responsive outreach and care

These investments will reduce the burden on emergency departments, law enforcement, and correctional facilities—while delivering more compassionate and effective services to those in need.

We see firsthand the devastating impact of gaps in crisis response. SB 196 ensures continued support for essential operations like Careline Alaska, making certain that no Alaskan in crisis is left without help.

Here are more reasons to pass this legislation:

- When it comes to mental health crisis, one call can save a life.
- Just as 911 is universally known for use during emergencies, like a heart attack or car accident, contacting 988 can be lifesaving for people experiencing a mental health crisis.
- Mental health crisis and suicides can be devastating for individuals, families, and communities. When someone experiences a mental health crisis and doesn't receive the

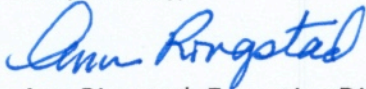
care they need, they can end up in emergency rooms, experience homelessness, become involved in the criminal justice system or worse, lose their life.

- We need to ensure that everyone who experiences a mental health crisis, no matter where they live, received a mental health response. A cornerstone of that response is a 24/7 crisis hotline.
- The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline was established as an easy-to-remember, 3-digit dialing code overing 24/7 crisis support via call, text or chat.
- Directing people to 988 can reduce the need for costly in-person responses to people in need, as many crises can be deescalated over the phone.
- But creating 988 is only the first step. Federal, state and local governments all have a role to play to ensure that there are resources to support 988 and that this universal number is the gateway to a local crisis continuum of care.
- Every person in crisis should have access to not just some to talk to (988), but someone to respond, and a safe place for help.
- It will take all of us to ensure that the true vision for the 988 Lifeline and a crisis continuum of care is achieved and that we can connect people in crisis to the care they need and deserve.

We urge lawmakers to pass SB 196 this session. This legislation is not only fiscally responsible—it is **life-saving**. It will provide the foundation for a stronger, more responsive behavioral health crisis system in Alaska for generations to come.

Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.

Respectfully,



Ann Ringstad, Executive Director
NAMI Alaska, Inc.