



February 4, 2013

**AMERICAN CIVIL  
LIBERTIES UNION OF  
ALASKA FOUNDATION**  
1057 W. Fireweed, Suite 207  
Anchorage, AK 99503  
(907) 258-0044  
(907) 258-0288 (fax)  
[WWW.AKCLU.ORG](http://WWW.AKCLU.ORG)

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The Honorable Pete Higgins, Chair  
The Honorable Wes Keller, Vice-Chair  
House Health and Social Services Committee  
Alaska State House of Representatives  
State Capitol, Room 106  
Juneau, AK 99801

via email: [Rep.Pete.Higgins@akleg.gov](mailto:Rep.Pete.Higgins@akleg.gov)  
[Rep.Wes.Keller@akleg.gov](mailto:Rep.Wes.Keller@akleg.gov)

**Re: HB 88: Intellectual and Development Disabilities  
ACLU Letter of Support**

Dear Chair Higgins & Vice-Chair Keller:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this Letter of Support with respect to House Bill 88.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Alaska represents thousands of members and activists throughout Alaska who seek to preserve and expand the individual freedoms and civil liberties guaranteed by the United States and Alaska Constitutions. From that perspective, we are pleased to support this legislation, which will revise relevant Alaska statutes to refer to individuals as having “intellectual and developmental disabilities” rather than as “mentally retarded.”

### **The Revised Terms Better Respect Alaskans**

As Representative Millett stated in the Sponsor statement, “‘Mental retardation,’ originally a clinical term introduced with good intentions, has been transformed into a derogatory term that is sometimes used to degrade and insult people with intellectual disabilities.” Language, particularly

language in the laws of a State, can lead to unfair and improper treatment – either intentional or otherwise. The ACLU has consistently worked to end invidious discrimination and supports the proposed change.

**By Matching the Language of Other Jurisdictions, the Bill Improves Research Ability**

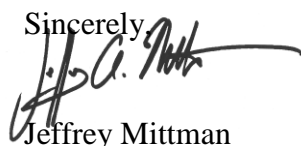
Representative Millett noted that other jurisdictions, such as “federal law, the Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organization, and the White House through the President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities,” use “intellectual and developmental disabilities” in lieu of “mental retardation.” By conforming the language of the Alaska Statutes to these other entities, Alaska better enables researchers and policymakers to search for one term – “intellectual and developmental disabilities” – instead of two, and thus HB 88 has the additional salutary effect of reducing transaction costs of comparing legislation, reviewing evidence, and devising policy.

**Conclusion**

We hope that this Letter of Support aids the Health and Social Services Committee in its evaluation and expected passage of House Bill 88.

Thank you again for letting us share our thoughts. Please feel free to contact the undersigned if you have any questions or wish additional information.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Mittman  
*Executive Director*  
ACLU of Alaska

cc: Representative Benjamin Nageak  
Representative Lance Pruitt  
Representative Lora Reinbold  
Representative Paul Seaton  
Representative Geran Tarr  
Sponsor, Representative Charisse Millett