

**Advisory Board on Alcoholism
and Drug Abuse**



Alaska Mental Health Board

ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD
ADVISORY BOARD ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE
431 NORTH FRANKLIN STREET, SUITE 200
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99801
(907) 465-8920

April 3, 2013

Representative Doug Isaacson
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: HB 178 — Certain Crimes Involving Controlled Substances

Dear Representative Isaacson,

The Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse and Alaska Mental Health Board support HB 178 reducing the penalty for first offenses involving possession of small amounts Schedule IIA controlled substances. There is ample research showing that traditional justice responses – jail and probation – for these types of offenses are less effective than community-based responses. HB 178 protects our communities by ensuring an appropriate justice response while reserving prison space for more serious offenders.

Long jail sentences for first time offenders have not been shown to improve public safety or decrease the incidence of drug crimes. They do increase the costs to the justice and corrections systems and to communities and families as a result of diminished economic and employment opportunities for returning offenders. What have proven effective in Alaska and nationally is community-based probation, education, treatment, and accountability programs. For example, participants in the Anchorage Wellness Court for misdemeanor alcohol offenses have shown to be less likely to reoffend than offenders subject to traditional sentencing responses.¹

By making first offenses involving possession of Schedule IIA controlled substances a Class A Misdemeanor, HB 178 preserves the courts' discretion to impose a jail sentence where appropriate, while also offering opportunities for effective community-based responses — participation in education and treatment programs, alcohol/drug testing, and community work service — through probation. Courts and communities have the chance, with HB 178, to use the conditions of probation available for misdemeanor offenses as opportunities for intervention and targeted prevention to divert first offenders from potential addiction and promote healthier choices.

The Boards appreciate your work on behalf of Alaskans.

Sincerely,

Michael Kerosky, Chairman
Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse

Brenda Moore, Chairperson
Alaska Mental Health Board

¹ *Impact and Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Anchorage Wellness Court*, Urban Institute Justice Policy Center (2008) available online at http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411746_anchorage_wellness.pdf.