

Kodiak Area Native Association



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Senator Gary Stevens
State Capitol Room 429
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Senator Stevens,

I really enjoyed your visit to the Kodiak Child Advocacy Center last year and know how supportive you are of our youth in Kodiak and throughout Alaska. At the Kodiak Child Advocacy Center we see many difficult circumstances facing our children as a result of maltreatment. The adverse childhood experience study clearly links maltreatment with developing medical and mental health challenges throughout their lifetime. I am writing to request your support for Education Funding Equality for Children with Mental Illness (HB102). This important piece of mental health and education legislation will assist children with severe emotional or behavioral disorders the opportunity to receive an equitable and comparable education while they receive intensive mental health treatment.

When our Kodiak youth have to go off island for treatment, their education suffers as they struggle experiencing a number of symptoms that make it truly difficult for them to concentrate and access an education meaningfully. Usually prior to any treatment or hospitalization, their symptoms are such that they are often failing classes to begin with. Currently when hospitalized for any treatment, students are left to access education via the computer which for most students is boring, lacks personalization for their particular problem and symptoms, and lacks a meaningful relationship with a human being to teach to their specific needs and gifts. Interestingly and anecdotally, education in which students' access classes via the computer or VTC is failing for our Kodiak village schools. Facilities charged with treating these vulnerable youth are not able to tailor student learning to the classes they left and they return to their home school even further behind and terribly confused. This lack of educational success will compound their struggle and contribute to diminished self-esteem. Seamless transition to their home school is necessary for success.

If treatment facilities had the ability to hire teachers and get information from home schools about specific student placement, progress, needs and skills, students could return with a foothold in their education and an educational plan that supports them during their time of need and vulnerability.

I want to go on record for supporting this legislation as it will:

- Increase the educational opportunities and measurable outcomes for children with mental illness so that they can successfully transition back to their traditional school after receiving intensive and sometimes lifesaving mental health treatment

- Allow the licensed facility to deliver appropriate educational and related services provided by licensed teachers and credentialed service providers to the student while the student is admitted to the facility
- Allow for a more comprehensive continuum of care by individualizing each student's academic plan to complement their therapeutic treatment goals
- Provide the state real time data that will assist the state with meeting the needs of other special populations such as students residing in rural villages
- Increase the length of time students spend in school learning and track measurable outcomes to be reviewed by state stakeholders

I ask you to support HB102 as it will improve the provision of educational services to the children with severe mental illness.

I look forward to visiting with you again,

Respectfully,

Joanna McFarlin
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Cc: Senator Charlie Huggins, Senator Cathy Giessel, Senator Mike Dunleavy, and Senator Berta Gardner