



ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD
ADVISORY BOARD ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE
431 NORTH FRANKLIN STREET, SUITE 203
JUNEAU, AK 99801
907-465-8920

February 26, 2018

To: The Honorable Senator Cathy Giessel
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau AK, 99801

RE: SB 128- An Act Establishing the Marijuana Education and Treatment Fund

Dear Senator Giessel;

The Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA) is the state planning and coordinating body for purposes of federal and state laws relating to alcohol, other drug and substance abuse prevention and treatment services. Along with the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB), ABADA advocates for programs and services that promote healthy, independent, productive Alaskans.

The ABADA/AMHB Boards supports Senate Bill No. 128 (SB 128) which creates a dedicated marijuana education and treatment fund for the State of Alaska. In regards to the proposed allocations we strongly encourage the use of these funds to support statewide marijuana prevention efforts, specifically for young Alaskans under the age of 21.

Research from the National Institute on Drug Abuse shows that using marijuana at an early age and for long periods of time may lead to serious problems like addiction, mental health issues, learning challenges, and dropping out of school. Along with our concerns about the impact of marijuana use on adolescent brain development, young Alaskans are at risk for involvement with the Division of Juvenile Justice and the Department of Corrections for marijuana possession and use.

According to the results of the 2017 Youth Behavioral Risk Survey (YRBS) Alaska Native youth are more likely to try marijuana before the age of 13 and use marijuana more regularly, than other Alaskan youth. We encourage DHSS to be thoughtful of culturally-based activities that work with Alaska Native youth and utilize existing grant programs, such as the partnership between the Division of Juvenile Justice and RurAL CAP.

Our boards also support surveilling the public perception of risk of marijuana use and monitoring public health outcomes of marijuana use in Alaskan youth and adults. These activities will build capacity within the State to understand and describe the impacts of marijuana use and misuse in the state and help better inform the Alaska Legislature, agencies within the Department of Health and Social Services, and community based substance misuse and behavioral health providers.

We encourage the creation of an interagency workgroup to oversee these funds, which should include representation from the Department of Education and Early Development, Division of Juvenile Justice, Division of Behavioral Health, and other key stakeholders. Prior to the expenditure of any marijuana education and treatment funds, this workgroup should assess and analyze current and emerging data sets to identify target populations in the most need of marijuana prevention and intervention activities.

Thank you for this opportunity to support and comment on SB 128 and please contact me if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Alison L. Kulas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alison" and last name "Kulas" clearly distinguishable.

Alison L. Kulas, MSPH
Executive Director