

# Report Highlights

## Why DLA Performed This Audit

The audit's purpose was to determine if there is a need for the council's continued existence and whether its termination date should be extended. The council is set to sunset June 30, 2019, and will have one year from that date to conclude its administrative operations.

## What DLA Recommends

1. The council's executive director should develop and implement procedures to ensure public notices for meetings are published timely and accurately.
2. The council chair should develop and implement written procedures to ensure performance evaluations are completed annually for the council's executive director.

# A Sunset Review of the Department of Health and Social Services, Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (council)

August 3, 2018

Audit Control Number 06-20115-18

## REPORT CONCLUSIONS

The audit found the council operated in the public's interest by actively broadening the public's awareness of suicide prevention, and coordinating the efforts of other suicide prevention entities including State agencies, regional groups, coalitions, and local communities. Additionally, the council fulfilled its statutory duty by issuing the 2018-2022 Suicide Prevention Plan and working closely with stakeholders to add and refine the plan's strategies, resources, and indicators. The audit also concluded that administrative improvements were needed to ensure council meetings are adequately public noticed and the executive director is consistently evaluated on an annual basis.

In accordance with AS 44.66.010(a)(7), the council is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 2019. We recommend that the legislature extend the council's termination date to June 30, 2027.

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# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

## LEGISLATIVE BUDGET AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

### Division of Legislative Audit



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August 22, 2018

Members of the Legislative Budget  
and Audit Committee:

In accordance with the provisions of Title 24 and Title 44 of the Alaska Statutes (sunset legislation), we have reviewed the activities of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (council) and the attached report is submitted for your review.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES  
STATEWIDE SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL  
SUNSET REVIEW

August 3, 2018

Audit Control Number  
06-20115-18

The audit was conducted as required by AS 44.66.050(a). Per AS 44.66.010(a)(7) the council is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 2019. We recommend that the legislature extend the council's termination date to June 30, 2027.

The audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Fieldwork procedures utilized in the course of developing the findings and recommendations presented in this report are discussed in the Objectives, Scope, and Methodology.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kris Curtis".

Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA  
Legislative Auditor

## ABBREVIATIONS

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ABADA	Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse
ACN	Audit Control Number
AFN	Alaska Federation of Natives
AMHB	Alaska Mental Health Board
AS	Alaska Statutes
CISA	Certified Information Systems Auditor
council	Statewide Suicide Prevention Council
CPA	Certified Public Accountant
DEED	Department of Education and Early Development
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Services
RSA	Reimbursable Services Agreement
SAPP	Suicide Awareness, Prevention, and Postvention
DLA	Division of Legislative Audit
FY	Fiscal Year

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# ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION

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## Statewide Suicide Prevention Council

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (council) is authorized by AS 44.29.350 to serve in an advisory capacity to the legislature and governor regarding suicide awareness and prevention. Statutes require the council annually report its findings and recommendations in a report to the governor, the president of the senate, and the speaker of the house.

Specifically, the statutes assign the following responsibilities to the council:

- improve health and wellness throughout the State by reducing suicide and its effect on individuals, families, and communities;
- broaden the public's awareness of suicide and the risk factors related to suicide;
- enhance suicide prevention services and programs throughout the state;
- develop healthy communities through comprehensive, collaborative, community-based, and faith-based approaches;

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## Exhibit 1

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### Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Members as of June 30, 2018

Barbara Franks, Chair  
*Survivor*

William Martin, Vice-Chair  
*Alaska Federation of Natives*

Randall Burns  
*Department of Health and Social Services*

Sharon Fishel  
*Department of Education and  
Early Development*

Robert Sanderson  
*Rural*

Brenda Moore-Beyers  
*Alaska Mental Health Board*

Monique Andrews  
*Military*

Cynthia Erickson  
*Public*

Britta Hamre  
*Youth*

Nicole Lebo  
*Youth Organization*

Lowell Sage, Jr.  
*Clergy*

Julie Vincek  
*Secondary Schools*

Vacant  
*Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug  
Abuse*

Senator Peter Micciche

Senator Tom Begich

Representative DeLena Johnson

Representative Geran Tarr

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Source: Office of the Governor, Boards and Commissions website.

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- develop and implement a statewide suicide prevention plan; and
  - strengthen existing and build new partnerships between public and private entities that will advance suicide prevention efforts in the State.

The council is administratively located within the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and includes 17 members; 13 are voting members, and four are non-voting ex-officio members representing the Alaska House of Representatives and the Alaska Senate. The governor appoints the 13 voting members as follows:

1. one employee of DHSS;
2. one employee of the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED);
3. one member of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA);
4. one member of the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB);
5. one person recommended by the Alaska Federation of Natives;
6. one person who is an employee of a secondary school;
7. one person who is active in a youth organization;
8. one person who has experienced the death by suicide of a member of the person's family;
9. one person who resides in a rural community in the State that is not connected by road or the Alaska Marine Highway to the main road system of the State;
10. one person who is a member of the clergy;
11. one person who is between the ages of 16 and 24;

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12. one person who is discharged from, retired from, or engaged in active duty military service in the armed forces of the United States, or who is a mental health provider, social worker, or other person actively providing a health care service to discharged, retired, or active military personnel; and
  13. one public member.

The council is staffed by a program assistant and an executive director. The council's executive director also serves as the executive director for AMHB and ABADA. The co-location is formalized by a memorandum of agreement between the three entities and facilitates collaboration through shared resources. Per the agreement, AMHB and ABADA pay the personal services and travel costs for the executive director until such time as the council has the resources to contribute.

DHSS staff provides the council administrative support such as public noticing of council activities, contract assistance, financial and budgetary reporting, and information technology support.

Operational costs for FY 15 through FY 18 are shown in Exhibit 2, including a reimbursable services agreement (RSA) with DEED for the Suicide Awareness, Prevention, and Postvention (SAPP) program.<sup>1</sup> The council's operations were funded by general fund appropriations.

Personal services represent the salary and benefits paid for the program assistant hired by the council to perform routine administrative duties. According to council staff, not all funding available was used by the council, in part, due to a reduction in travel costs over the past several years. Additionally, the council and staff sought ways to reduce expenditures such as meeting in State conference rooms or donated spaces and sharing other costs through the co-location with AMHB and ABADA.

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<sup>1</sup>The SAPP program provides eLearning training courses about suicide awareness, prevention, and postvention; and provides direct services for at-risk youth in school districts through grants.

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**Exhibit 2**

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**Statewide Suicide Prevention Council  
Schedule of Expenditures and Funding Sources  
FY 15 through FY 18  
(Unaudited)**

	<b>FY 15</b>	<b>FY 16</b>	<b>FY 17</b>	<b>FY 18</b>
<b>Expenditures:</b>				
Personal Services	\$91,340	\$95,246	\$93,479	\$100,767
Travel	19,052	13,343	8,546	17,598
Services	40,370	12,432	50,335	15,918
Commodities	420	2,190	2,892	1,444
RSA to DEED	<u>475,000</u>	<u>475,000</u>	<u>461,700</u>	<u>461,700</u>
<b>Total Operating Expenditures</b>	<u>626,182</u>	<u>598,211</u>	<u>616,952</u>	<u>597,427</u>
<b>Funding Sources:</b>				
General Fund Appropriations	<u>\$662,500</u>	<u>\$664,600</u>	<u>\$650,600</u>	<u>\$654,500</u>

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Source: Division of Behavioral Health staff.

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# REPORT CONCLUSIONS

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In developing our conclusion regarding whether the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council's (council) termination date should be extended, its operations were evaluated using the 11 factors set out in AS 44.66.050(c), which are included in Appendix A of this report. Under the State's "sunset" law, these factors are to be considered in assessing whether an entity has demonstrated a public policy need for continuing operations.

The audit found that the council operated in the public's interest by actively broadening the public's awareness of suicide prevention, and coordinating the efforts of other suicide prevention entities including State agencies, regional groups, coalitions, and local communities. Additionally, the council fulfilled its statutory duty by issuing the 2018-2022 Suicide Prevention Plan and working closely with stakeholders to add and refine the plan's strategies, resources, and indicators. The audit also concluded that administrative improvements were needed to ensure council meetings are adequately public noticed and the executive director is consistently evaluated on an annual basis. (Recommendations 1 and 2)

In accordance with AS 44.66.010(a)(7), the council is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 2019. We recommend that the legislature extend the council's termination date to June 30, 2027.

Detailed report conclusions are as follows.

**The council operated effectively, however administrative improvements are needed.**

The audit reviewed nine of the 18 meetings held from July 2014 through March 2018, and found that council meetings were conducted in an effective manner and provided time for public comment. However, auditors found five of the 18 meetings were not public noticed or not public noticed properly.<sup>2</sup> (Recommendation 1) Additionally, the audit found the executive director's performance evaluations were not consistently completed annually as required by statute.<sup>3</sup> From July 2014 through

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<sup>2</sup>All 18 meetings were evaluated for compliance with public notice requirements.

<sup>3</sup>AS 44.29.330(b).

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March 2018, two evaluations were completed for the executive director, when four evaluations should have been performed. (Recommendation 2)

**Suicide continues to be a serious issue for the State.**

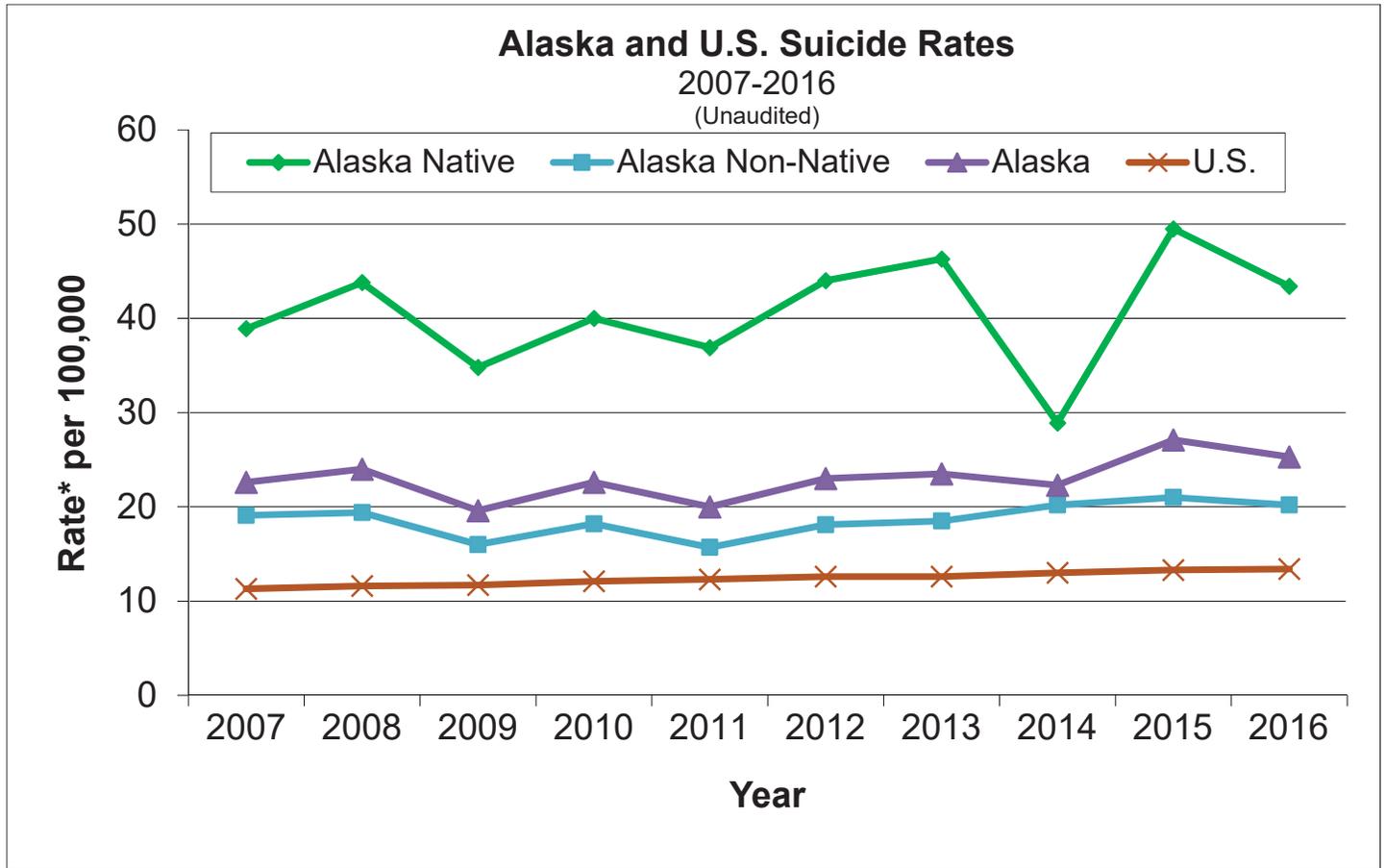
The audit's review of council meeting minutes found concerns by stakeholders over inadequate resources for the awareness and prevention of suicide in Alaska. Suicide rates in Alaska over the 10 year period remained nearly twice the national average and suicide rates amongst Alaska Natives were between four and five times above the national average (see Exhibit 3). To promote awareness, council members and staff expressed a desire to be present in more communities throughout Alaska, however, the council's travel was limited due to budget concerns.

Exhibit 3 shows that suicide rates among Alaska Natives dropped significantly in 2014. According to Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Behavioral Health management, council staff, and council members, the drop may be due, in part, to the effectiveness of public service announcements; an increased awareness of Careline, an intervention phone line; and an increase in council presentations. In addition, per the council's 2014 annual report, 2,606 Alaskans completed training on suicide prevention in 2014 through the Department of Education and Early Development's (DEED) eLearning system compared to 1,326 the prior year.

**The council actively worked to reduce suicide in Alaska.**

The council serves as the State's central agency for advising the legislature and governor on the actions that can and should be taken to reduce suicide and its effect on individuals, families, and communities. As such, developing and implementing a statewide suicide prevention plan is one of its most significant statutory duties. The council's 2012-2017 suicide prevention plan titled "Casting the Net Upstream" was issued January 2012. The council started working with various stakeholder groups to update the plan in 2016. A revised plan for the five year period 2018-2022, titled "Recasting

Exhibit 3



Source: Council staff compiled data from DHSS Division of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention websites.  
\*Rate is age adjusted, a statistical process applied to rates to make fairer comparisons between groups with different age distributions.

the Net” was issued January 2018. The updated plan moves from a system focused on intervention to one that emphasizes prevention by promoting the health of people, families, and communities.

The statewide plan asks Alaskan individuals, families, communities, and State government to take more responsibility for the entire spectrum of suicide prevention by promoting physical, emotional, and mental wellness, and strengthening personal and community resilience to prevent suicide. Within the plan, there are six overarching goals with several implemented strategies identified for each goal, as well as resources for individuals, communities, and agencies to help achieve each goal. The plan tracks progress toward achieving goals by publishing data when available.

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The statewide plan is aligned with the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and the American Indian and Alaska Native National Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan. The plan states that the alignment helps the council and other stakeholders evaluate Alaska's efforts against national standards and other states' efforts. Exhibit 4 lists the six overarching goals of the 2018-2022 plan.

#### Exhibit 4

### Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan Prevention Goals 2018-2022

**Goal 1:** Alaskans accept responsibility for preventing suicide.

**Goal 2:** Alaskans prevent and mitigate the impact of trauma, substance abuse, and other risk factors contributing to suicide.

**Goal 3:** Alaskans communicate, cooperate, and coordinate suicide prevention efforts.

**Goal 4:** Alaskans have immediate access to the prevention, treatment, and recovery services they need.

**Goal 5:** Alaskans support survivors in healing.

**Goal 6:** Quality data and research is available and used for planning, implementation, and evaluation of suicide prevention efforts.

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Source: State of Alaska Suicide Prevention Plan 2018-2022.

On a statewide basis, the council coordinates suicide prevention efforts of other organizations. Most of the council's activities involved some aspect of collaboration between stakeholders, supporting various outreach and educational programs, advocating for funding, and providing technical assistance as needed. While there are other governmental and private sector agencies that have a common goal in the prevention of suicide, no other organization performs the statewide coordinator function.

During the audit period, the council was active in supporting and helping implement services, performing outreach, providing

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training, and facilitating collaboration. All of these activities help achieve one or more of the statewide suicide prevention plan goals shown in Exhibit 4.

A summary of significant council activities from July 2014 through March 2018 is shown in Exhibit 5.

## Exhibit 5

### Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Activities July 2014 through March 2018

#### Support Services:

- Advocated for funding for the Careline suicide hotline.
- Coordinated and provided technical assistance to community coalitions located in both rural villages and urban communities to collaborate on suicide awareness and prevention efforts. Also advocated for coalition funding.
- Provided funding for competitive grants for the Suicide Awareness, Prevention, and Postvention program, which provides direct service for at-risk youth in the school districts. The grants are administered by DEED.
- Provided technical assistance and advocated for funds from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to DEED for mental health counselors to provide immediate access to mental health assessment, services, and referrals for students at risk.
- Provided educational presentations in 2015 at the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) convention, School Counselors Association Conference, School Health and Wellness Initiative Conference, Garrett Lee Smith Grantee Conference, Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference, and the Statewide Independent Living Council.

#### Outreach:

- Coordinated with the Alaska Chapter of the American foundation for Suicide Prevention since FY 15 to host suicide awareness walks/runs in communities across the State.
- Created or provided technical assistance for public service announcements.
- Coordinated the distribution of suicide prevention materials along the route of the Iron Dog race since 2015. Also, provided technical assistance for public service announcements during the race.
- Coordinated and provided technical assistance for developing images and videos that were distributed on various social media platforms in 2016 at the AFN convention. Also, hosted a booth at the convention since 2015 giving away printed materials and Careline magnets.
- Provided coordination and technical assistance between the Juneau Suicide Prevention Coalition and the University of Alaska Southeast for a two-day summit in June of 2016. Also, provided printed materials and information.

#### Training:

- Coordinated and provided technical assistance to the Forget-Me-Not Coalition during FY 16 for suicide prevention training for active duty military, law enforcement, and community organizations focused on supporting service members, veterans, and families.
- Coordinated, funded, and provided technical assistance to DEED to assist in creating and revising online eLearning modules for educators, social workers, and nurses.
- Coordinated with the Division of Behavioral Health since FY 15 to provide in-person training offered through “Connect Training” designed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness in New Hampshire. Connect Training provides customized training and interaction with experts in the field of suicide prevention and postvention.

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## Exhibit 5

### Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Activities July 2014 through March 2018 (Continued)

#### **Collaboration:**

- Advocated for funding in FY 17 for a five year grant from the National Institute of Mental Health for Alaska Native Research helping native communities share knowledge, guide research, and identify culturally-relevant suicide prevention strategies in rural areas.
- Participated in and provided technical assistance as a member of the governor's suicide prevention work group during FY 16.
- Coordinated with a group of clergy leaders and provided technical assistance to the Arctic Resource Center for Suicide Prevention in FY 15, which developed a faith-based suicide prevention curriculum for preaching ministers.
- Provided technical assistance and support to the Alaska Community Foundation and Alaska Children's Trust to establish and maintain an annual grant program funded by GCI to promote mental wellness and reduce the rates of suicide in Alaska.

Source: Compiled based on a list of activities provided by council staff.

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# FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The prior 2012 sunset audit made three recommendations:

- The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (council) should, in accordance with statute, appoint its own coordinator and conduct annual performance reviews.
- The council should monitor meeting attendance and inform the Office of the Governor of poor member attendance.
- The council should develop and monitor performance measures that support statutory duties and annually report progress.

The prior recommendation to appoint a coordinator and perform annual reviews has been partially resolved. Since the prior audit, the council formalized the leadership structure with the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse through a written agreement. However, the council did not consistently perform annual evaluations of the executive director. The unresolved portion of the prior recommendation is reiterated as Recommendation 2.

The prior recommendation regarding monitoring of meeting attendance is considered resolved. The council monitored meeting attendance at quarterly meetings held during the audit period, and meeting agendas included an attendance discussion at the start of each meeting. Furthermore, the audit found no instances where quorum was not met.

The prior recommendation to develop and monitor performance measures that support statutory duties is generally resolved. The council's annual reports identified activities performed during the year that supported its statutory duties. Additionally, the suicide prevention plan identifies strategies for each goal and reports data when available to track progress.

One new recommendation is made as part of this audit.

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**Recommendation No. 1:**

**The council's executive director should develop and implement procedures to ensure public notices for meetings are published timely and accurately.**

From July 2014 through March 2018, five of the 18 meetings held (28 percent) were not public noticed or not public noticed properly. Specifically, two were not published on the State's Online Public Notices system, two were published with incorrect meeting dates, and one was published one day prior to the meeting. The deficiencies were caused by a lack of written procedures to ensure notices are posted timely and contain accurate meeting dates.

Although council by-laws do not contain public notice requirements, the Open Meetings Act, AS 44.62.310(e), states that reasonable public notice shall be given for all meetings required to be open. The notice must include the date, time, and place of the meeting and, if the meeting is by teleconference, the location of any teleconferencing facilities. Additionally, per statute all meetings are required to be posted on the Alaska Online Public Notices system. By not adequately posting public notices of council meetings, the public and interested stakeholders may not have been provided an opportunity to participate and provide feedback on council matters.

We recommend the council's executive director develop and implement procedures to ensure public notices for meetings are published timely and accurately.

**Recommendation No. 2:**

**The council chair should develop and implement written procedures to ensure performance evaluations are completed annually for the council's executive director.**

Between July 2014 and March 2018, two evaluations were completed for the executive director; however, two more should have been completed. Specifically, there were no evaluations for the period of November 2014 to November 2015, and November 2015 to June 2016. Per discussion with council staff and the previous council chair, it is unclear why the evaluations were not completed for the executive director.

Alaska Statute 44.29.330(b) states:

*The council may employ a coordinator<sup>4</sup> to assist the council. The coordinator is in the partially exempt*

<sup>4</sup>The title of the coordinator is executive director.

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*service. The coordinator shall be directly responsible to the council in the performance of the coordinator's duties. The council shall annually review the performance of the coordinator.*

Absent timely feedback, the executive director may not perform as expected and, as a result, may negatively affect the council's ability to meet its statutory objectives.

We recommend the council chair develop and implement procedures to ensure performance evaluations are completed annually for the council's executive director.

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# OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

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In accordance with Title 24 and 44 of the Alaska Statutes, we have reviewed the activities of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (council) to determine if there is a demonstrated public need for its continued existence.

As required by AS 44.66.050(a), this report shall be considered by the committee of reference during the legislative oversight process in determining whether the council should be reestablished. Currently, under AS 44.66.010(a)(7), the council will terminate on June 30, 2019, and will have one year from that date to conclude its administrative operations.

## Objectives

The three central, interrelated objectives of our report are:

1. To determine if the termination date of the council should be extended.
2. To determine if the council is operating in the public's interest.
3. To determine the status of recommendations made in the prior sunset audit.

## Scope

The assessment of operations and performance of the council was based on criteria set out in AS 44.66.050(c). Criteria set out in the statute relates to the determination of a demonstrated public need for the council. We reviewed the council's activities from July 1, 2014, through March 31, 2018. Financial information is presented, unaudited, from July 1, 2014, through June 30, 2018.

## Methodology

During the course of our audit, we reviewed and evaluated the following:

- The prior sunset audit report (ACN 06-20074-12) to identify issues affecting the council and to identify prior sunset audit recommendations.

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- Applicable statutes to identify council functions and responsibilities, determine whether statutory changes enhanced or impeded council activities, and help ascertain if the council operated in the public interest.
  - Council meeting minutes and annual reports to gain an understanding of council proceedings and activities, the nature and extent of public input, whether a quorum was maintained, and whether council vacancies impeded operations.
  - The State's Online Public Notices system to verify the council meetings were adequately public noticed.
  - Expenditures and revenues for the council to identify costs of operations, pass through funds, and funding sources.
  - Various State and news related websites to identify complaints against the council or other council related concerns.
  - Council by-laws to gain an understanding of council functions and responsibilities.
  - The previous Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan (2012-2017) as well as the revised plan (2018-2022) to determine compliance with statutes and to evaluate council operations.
  - The memorandum of agreement between the council, the Alaska Mental Health Board, and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, to determine status of a prior recommendation.
  - Performance evaluation reports to determine compliance with statutes.
  - Documents including reimbursable service agreements, website content, and quarterly reports relating to the Suicide Awareness, Prevention, and Postvention program administered by Department of Education and Early Development to understand objectives, intended outcomes, and expenditures.

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- Various national and state websites relating to the council and/or suicide awareness and prevention.
  - A list of council activities from July 2014 through March 2018 to evaluate operations and help ascertain if the council operated in the public interest.

To identify and evaluate council activities we conducted interviews with council members and staff from the council, Department of Health and Social Services Division of Behavioral Health, Lieutenant Governor's office, and Department of Education and Early Development. Specific topics of inquiry included council operations, suicide prevention efforts, duplication of efforts, complaints against the council, and results of grant activity under the purview of the council.

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## APPENDIX SUMMARY

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Appendix A provides the sunset criteria used in developing our conclusion regarding whether the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council's termination date should be extended.

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## APPENDIX A

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### **Analysis of Public Need Criteria AS 44.66.050(c)**

A determination as to whether a board or commission has demonstrated a public need for its continued existence must take into consideration the following factors:

1. the extent to which the board or commission has operated in the public interest;
2. the extent to which the operation of the board or commission has been impeded or enhanced by existing statutes, procedures, and practices that it has adopted, and any other matter, including budgetary, resource, and personnel matters;
3. the extent to which the board or commission has recommended statutory changes that are generally of benefit to the public interest;
4. the extent to which the board or commission has encouraged interested persons to report to it concerning the effect of its regulations and decisions on the effectiveness of service, economy of service, and availability of service that it has provided;
5. the extent to which the board or commission has encouraged public participation in the making of its regulations and decisions;
6. the efficiency with which public inquiries or complaints regarding the activities of the board or commission filed with it, with the department to which a board or commission is administratively assigned, or with the office of victims' rights or the office of the ombudsman have been processed and resolved;
7. the extent to which a board or commission that regulates entry into an occupation or profession has presented qualified applicants to serve the public;
8. the extent to which state personnel practices, including affirmative action requirements, have been complied with

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by the board or commission in its own activities and the area of activity or interest;

9. the extent to which statutory, regulatory, budgetary, or other changes are necessary to enable the board or commission to better serve the interests of the public and to comply with the factors enumerated in this subsection;
10. the extent to which the board or commission has effectively attained its objectives and purposes and the efficiency with which the board or commission has operated; and
11. the extent to which the board or commission duplicates the activities of another governmental agency or the private sector.

# Agency Response from the Department of Health and Social Services



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

## Department of Health and Social Services

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October 30, 2018

Ms. Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA  
Legislative Auditor  
Division of Legislative Audit  
P.O. Box 113300  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-3300

RECEIVED

OCT 30 2018

LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

Dear Ms. Curtis:

RE: Response to Legislative Audit Confidential Preliminary Audit report, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Sunset Review, August 3, 2018

We appreciate the opportunity to review and evaluate the audit report with the associated recommendations as shared in your confidential audit report. Below are the department's responses.

In response to the Report Conclusions:

DHSS concurs with the report and recommendations contained in the management letter and appreciates the recommendation that the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council ("Council") be extended to June 30, 2027. As the report notes, suicide continues to be a serious issue for the state with rates approximately twice the national average. The Council has worked hard over the years to advise legislators and the Governor on ways to improve Alaskan's health and wellness by reducing suicide, improving public awareness of suicide and risk factors, enhancing suicide prevention efforts, and working with partners to develop healthier communities. The recommendation that the Council be extended to 2027 will allow the council to implement strategies in the five-year state suicide prevention plan *Recasting the Net: Promoting Wellness to Prevent Suicide in Alaska 2018-2022*.

Recommendation No. 1: The council's executive director should develop and implement policies and procedures to ensure public notices for meetings are published timely and accurately.

DHSS concurs with the recommendation. The Council has worked over the years to ensure all meetings are open to the public and have reached out to key community partners to alert them of

Ms. Kris Curtis  
October 30, 2018  
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public comment periods. The Council will develop and implement policies and procedures to ensure public notices for meetings are published timely and accurately. DHSS also appreciates the recognition that Council meetings were conducted in an effective manner and allowed for public comment.

Recommendation No. 2: The council chair should develop and implement written procedures to ensure performance evaluations are completed annually for the council's executive director.

DHSS concurs with recommendation. The Council chair will work with the leadership of the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA) to develop and implement procedures to ensure performance evaluations are completed annually for the Council's Executive Director.

Analysis of Public Need:

DHSS appreciates the effort taken by Legislative Audit staff to fully explore and understand the work of the Council and the role they play in broadening the public's awareness of suicide and prevention and coordinating the efforts of other suicide prevention entities including State agencies, regional groups, coalitions, and local communities. We believe that the efforts the council has supported in training, public service announcements to increase awareness of the Careline, and grantee work has made a difference while recognizing that there is more to accomplish.

The Council is needed to leverage various resources and coordinate statewide suicide prevention activities. It encourages active collaboration between stakeholders and supports training and technical assistance for communities. DHSS appreciates the recognition of this important role and looks forward to the Council's implementation of its five-year suicide prevention plan.

Please contact Linnea Osborne, Accountant V at (907) 465-6333 if you have any questions or require additional documentation.

Sincerely,



Jay C. Butler, M.D.  
Commissioner

Cc: Monique Martin, Acting Deputy Commissioner  
Jon Sherwood, Deputy Commissioner  
Shawnda O'Brien, Assistant Commissioner  
Gennifer Moreau-Johnsons, Acting Director of Division of Behavioral Health  
Linnea Osborne, Accountant V

# Agency Response from the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council



THE STATE  
of ALASKA  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

## Department of Health and Social Services

STATEWIDE SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL

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October 19, 2018

Ms. Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA  
Legislative Auditor  
Division of Legislative Audit  
P.O. Box 113300  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-3300

RECEIVED

OCT 19 2018

LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

Re: Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Sunset Audit

Dear Ms. Curtis:

Please accept the following as the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council's response to the confidential preliminary audit report issued October 9, 2018.

#### In response to the Report Conclusions:

We appreciate the recommendation that the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council ("Council") be extended to June 30, 2027. As the report notes, suicide continues to be a serious issue for the state with rates approximately twice the national average. The Council has worked hard over the years to advise legislators and the Governor on ways to improve Alaskan's health and wellness by reducing suicide, improving public awareness of suicide and risk factors, enhancing suicide prevention efforts, and working with partners to develop healthier communities. The recommendation that the Council be extended to 2027 will allow us to implement strategies in the five-year state suicide prevention plan *Recasting the Net: Promoting Wellness to Prevent Suicide in Alaska*.

#### In response to Recommendation No. 1:

We appreciate the recognition that Council meetings were conducted in an effective manner and allowed for public comment. We acknowledge the deficiencies in adequately public noticing all meetings and understand the importance of publishing meeting details timely and accurately. We have worked over the years to ensure all meetings are open to the public and have reached out to key community partners to alert them of public comment periods. We will develop and implement policies and procedures to ensure public notices for meetings are published timely and accurately.

#### In response to Recommendation No. 2:

We acknowledge the importance of completing evaluations for the Executive Director with an annual performance review. As Council Chair, I will work with the leadership of the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA) to develop and implement procedures to ensure performance evaluations are completed annually for the Council's Executive Director.

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In response to the Analysis of Public Need:

We appreciate the effort taken by Legislative Audit staff to fully explore and understand the work of the Council and the role we play in broadening the public's awareness of suicide and prevention and coordinating the efforts of other suicide prevention entities including State agencies, regional groups, coalitions, and local communities. We believe that the efforts we have supported in training, public service announcements to increase awareness of the Careline, and grantee work has made a difference but there is much more work to do.

The Council has been critical to leverage various resources and act as a coordinator of all statewide suicide prevention activities. We encourage active collaboration between stakeholders and support training and technical assistance for communities. We appreciate the recognition of this important role and look forward to updating our progress toward the six overarching goals to promote wellness and prevent suicide as we implement the five-year strategic plan.

Thank you to the Legislative Audit team for the time and careful consideration in the audit of our Council. The process will lead to improvements in our work and will help inform legislators and the public about our efforts to reduce the impact of suicide in Alaska.

Sincerely,



Barbara Franks  
Chairperson  
Statewide Suicide Prevention Council

Cc: Dr. Jay Butler, Commissioner, DHSS