

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



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## Sponsor Statement for HB 183 version E

Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) is the cornerstone institution for Alaska's mental health network. This is the primary facility for treatment and referral for complex behavioral health issues, forensic patients and those needing long-term complex care.

Over the past few years, economic crisis and drug epidemic has led to a drastic increase in the number of referrals to API following years of budget cuts to the behavioral health budget and API. The result was a system overstretched and facing increased burdens at the same time it had fewer resources.

House Bill 183 would ensure the safety of API for patients, staff and the community by addressing staff retention, wage disparities with the private sector, and bed capacity. In order for the institute to operate at optimal capacity, API needs to fix its retention and return crisis and maintain an adequate amount of beds able to receive patients and the center of Alaska's behavioral health network. Doing so allows hospital emergency rooms to free up emergency room beds that are currently held by psychiatric patients waiting to be admitted to API. It requires the department to identify areas of concerns and work with the legislature with its annual report to create proactive solutions for API surrounding staffing and bed counts.