



March 5, 2020

Representative Matt Claman
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK. 99801
Rep.Matt.Claman@akleg.gov

Dear Representative Claman,

Please accept this letter of support from the Mat-Su Health Foundation for HB 290, Alternative to Arrest, Mental Health Center. Mat-Su Health Foundation (MSHF) is the official business name of Valley Hospital Association, which shares ownership in Mat-Su Regional Medical Center (MSRMC). MSHF invests its share of the hospital's profits back into the community through grants and scholarships to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans living in Mat-Su.

The prevalence of mental health and substance use problems is increasing in our community and statewide. The average annual growth rate for visits to the MSRMC Emergency Department (ED) by patients with a Behavioral Health (BH) diagnosis grew 20% from 2015 to 2017, due in part to the opioid epidemic and a shortage of outpatient treatment access. Additionally, from 2014 to 2017, the number of BH assessments required for patients in crisis in the MSRMC ED grew from 349 to more than 1,000. This escalation increases Alaska's costs across all systems and payors.

In the 2013 Mat-Su Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), Mat-Su residents ranked health issues they were concerned about. The top five were all related to mental health and substance use. As a follow-up to the CHNA, MSHF conducted a Mat-Su Behavioral Health Environmental Scan (BHES), where we looked at policies that could address barriers to access care and improve the BH system. The BHES recommended adding a crisis stabilization center to the BH continuum of care in Mat-Su as a cost-effective alternative to jail or the ED.

We support HB 290 because it will help prevent people in BH crisis from being unnecessarily incarcerated, and it paves the way for them to receive medical evaluation and care in lower cost settings than hospital ED's. HB 290 will allow police to bring patients to a crisis stabilization center instead. We anticipate this new service in the BH continuum of care will result in better outcomes for patients, decreased impacts on law enforcement, improved job satisfaction for first responders and medical providers, and tremendous cost savings for the State of AK.

By example, a crisis stabilization center in Maricopa County, Arizona had stunning results over 10 years' time:

- Savings equivalent to 37 full-time law enforcement officers because it is less labor-intensive to take people to a crisis stabilization drop-off center than to book them into jail.
- Reduction of 45 cumulative years of psychiatric boarding in hospital ED's—a savings of \$37 million in cost.
- Reduction of \$260 million in state-paid acute care inpatient expense.

The Alaska Department of Health & Social Services, Municipality of Anchorage, AK Mental Health Trust Authority, MSHF and other key stakeholders are determining how to build crisis services and infrastructure into the BH continuum of care—initially in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Mat-Su—and then statewide. However, current state statute prohibits law enforcement from taking people to an alternative site other than a jail or hospital. HB 290 will change that.

This legislation will help us to modernize and transform our crisis response systems and alleviate suffering for people experiencing BH crisis while delivering significant cost savings, especially for Alaska's Medicaid program. MSHF is in strong support of HB 290 and we urge you to pass this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Chief Executive Officer