



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Public Safety

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The Honorable Liz Snyder
Co-Chair, House HSS Committee
Alaska State Capitol Room 421
Juneau AK 99801-1182

The Honorable Tiffany Zulkosky
Co-Chair, House HSS Committee
Alaska State Capitol Room 416
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Letter of Support for HB 172 Mental Health Facilities & Meds

Dear Co-Chair Snyder, Co-Chair Zulkosky, and Members of the House Health & Social Services Committee:

I write to you to express the Department of Public Safety's (DPS) support for House Bill 172.

DPS views law enforcement's response to mental health calls as a serious priority and supports subacute mental health facilities for people experiencing mental health crises. Troopers often respond to incidents where people are experiencing suicidal thoughts, manic or delusional episodes, depression, or situations where the person isn't safe due to consumption of drugs or alcohol and poses a risk of harm to themselves or others.

These interactions present challenges for law enforcement officers who often must choose between taking the person to the hospital or to jail, when neither seems appropriate. For law enforcement officers, these situations can create tension between their duty to serve and their duty to protect.

Trooper investigations sometimes reveal no crime, but the subject needs immediate assistance; this type of occurrence is when a crisis stabilization center can offer an alternative to inappropriate placement in jails, full-scale medical services, or being left to suffer.

First responders spend excessive amounts of time waiting to make transfers at emergency holding places. This can be difficult and frustrating for officers and yet is a common experience many State Troopers face. Often an officer is seeking care for an individual in crisis, who has not committed a crime, but must keep them in their custody until they are able to find a safe disposition. This means that person is in handcuffs in the back of a law enforcement vehicle.

Troopers respond to rapidly evolving situations and must use the tools, facilities, and services available at the time. This bill creates additional options that are a better resource for the individual in crisis and an additional option for promptly connecting people to the care needed, enabling law enforcement to efficiently get back to community public safety.

Under the proposed statutory changes law enforcement would be able to take individuals in mental health crisis to 23-hour crisis stabilization centers or crisis residential centers as an additional option to local emergency rooms or jail.

HB 172 will ensure people get appropriate care swiftly, keep them out of jails and emergency rooms, and minimize the impact on first responders.

Through training and collaboration with stakeholders, the centers described in HB 172 are the best place to take a person in mental health crisis who is perceived to be a harm to themselves or others. This is an enhancement to our existing options in the community which are limited by what currently exists in law.

I urge your prompt and favorable action on this bill.

Sincerely,



James E. Cockrell
Commissioner