



April 12, 2022

House Finance Committee
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK. 99801

Dear Representatives Foster, Merrick, Ortiz, Wool, Edgemon, Josephson, Rasmussen, Thompson, LeBon, Carpenter and Johnson,

On behalf of the Mat-Su Health Foundation and its Board of Directors, I am writing to express support for HB 172, "Mental Health Facilities and Meds." The Mat-Su Health Foundation shares ownership in Mat-Su Regional Medical Center and invests its profits from that partnership back into the community to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans living in the Mat-Su.

Over the last several years the Mat-Su Health Foundation (MSHF) published three reports examining the care that Borough residents receive when they are experiencing a behavioral health crisis. The reports were the result of an ongoing research project called a Behavioral Health Environmental Scan (BHES). It was conducted in response to the foundation's 2013 Community Health Needs Assessment that ranked mental and emotional health and substance abuse as the Borough's highest-priority health concerns.

The first report in the BHES report focused on the Mat-Su's crisis response system, which includes ambulances, law enforcement, and hospital emergency rooms. The report demonstrated that the current system of care is not adequately meeting the needs of local residents seeking behavioral health treatment. Many people do not receive behavioral health care until they have reached the point of crisis. Care provided to individuals who are in crisis in an emergency department is often less effective than other types of care provided in a nonhospital setting by behavioral health professionals, yet there are gaps in the availability of these services. Based upon this data gathered for the study, thirteen recommendations were presented in the report. Many of those recommendations have already been implemented, including Medicaid Expansion to make behavioral health care available to more people, the provision of crisis intervention team training for law enforcement and emergency responders, hospital and other crisis system staff, and trauma-informed training for first responders. Transformation of the behavioral health crisis system according to the "Crisis Now" model is the next logical step, and HB 172 lays the groundwork for this.

HB 172 will give law enforcement and first responders an appropriate option for people in crisis to receive short-term mental health treatment quickly, keeping them out of jails and emergency rooms, and better serving the needs of both the person in crisis and the first responders dispatched to help them. This collaborative "no wrong door" approach will expand the number of facilities that can conduct a 72-hour evaluation, add a new, less restrictive level of care, and lead to faster, more appropriate response to crisis events.

We thank you in advance for moving this important legislation forward.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Ripley
President and CEO

From: Jeanette Grasto [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, April 11, 2022 1:08 PM
To: House Finance
Subject: Please support HB172

Importance: High

Dear House Finance Members,

Please vote to move HB172 out of your committee. This bill would allow those who are involuntarily committed and in need of behavioral health treatment the less restrictive option of a 23 hour crisis stabilization and short term housing crisis center. NAMI believes that these additional options for our citizens experiencing a mental health crisis will be able to address many in crisis without the trauma of a long wait in the ER and transfer to the mental health unit. The hospital option will still remain for those who require them.

The Crisis Now model is the best thing we have ever done in crisis care for those with behavioral health issues. It is something we should have done a long time ago, treating a behavioral crisis with a behavioral health response.

We have great respect for law enforcement and are part of the training team for Crisis Intervention. This would make law enforcement's work easier by allowing them to take someone to a Crisis Respite Center instead of the Emergency Room when appropriate.

Thank you for your support,

Jeanette Grasto
NAMI Fairbanks President
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@com