



April 19th, 2022

Representative Kelly Merrick
Co-Chair, House Finance Committee
representative.kelly.merrick@akleg.gov;

Representative Foster
Co-Chair, House Finance Committee
Representative.neal.foster@akleg.gov;

RE: HB172 – Mental Health Facilities & Meds

Representatives Merrick & Foster,


The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the Council) fills a variety of federal and state roles, including serving as the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act. As the state DD Council, the Council works with Senior and Disabilities Services and other state agencies to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families receive the services and supports that they need, as well as participate in the planning and design of those services. Our council membership is composed of self-advocates and family members of individuals with intellectual and development disabilities (60%), as well as agency and partner representatives (40%). One of the duties of the state DD Council is providing comments on proposed recommendations that may have an impact on individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families.


We want to offer a strong statement of support for HB172 and urge legislators to pass it.

It has been recognized that many in Alaska are suffering from mental health crises, and often those individuals wind up in the criminal justice and penal systems. Our current system is overly reliant on having law enforcement respond to crisis situations. Despite increased emphasis on responder training and supports, many law enforcement officers are neither equipped nor trained to properly deliver mental health crisis care and their presence often increases the stress and anxiety of an individual in crisis and can be stigmatizing.

There is a better way. Systemic quality crisis care includes high tech crisis call centers, non-law enforcement mobile crisis response teams, crisis stabilization centers, and the community. These quality crisis systems can be further enhanced by harnessing data and technology, drawing on the wisdom of individuals with lived experience, delivering services where the person is, and providing evidence-based suicide prevention and mental health care. Perhaps the most potent element of this system is the increased emphasis on the humanity of those who are most vulnerable.

Sincerely,


Myranda Walso
Executive Director, GCDSE


Art DeLaune
GCDSE Legislative Committee Chair