



Actionable Data Consulting

Dear Senator Scott Kawasaki and the House Health and Social Services Committee,

I am writing in support of SB 196. This bill will allow crucial funding for our Behavioral Health Crisis Services. I am the Mat-Su Crisis Now Coordinator, and I have seen the development of these types of crisis services in my community. Twelve years ago, someone having a behavioral health crisis in our community would end up either at Mat-Su Pretrial or the local emergency room. In either place, they would receive no care specific to their crisis. Now, we have a crisis call line, a mobile crisis team, and some crisis stabilization. Our residents are getting the care they need to resolve the crisis and not end up in crisis again in the near future.

Grants are key to keeping these services alive because other funding streams either do not exist (private insurance and Medicare) or are insufficient (Medicaid). Alaska is in a dire fiscal situation; general fund dollars are slim/ we have a massive deficit, and federal dollars for critical behavioral health and substance use disorder programs are being slashed, and we expect to see more cuts. Alaska's Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery Grants have been significantly cut since 2019.

SB 198 will allow us sustainable funding for Crisis Now-related services in Mat-Su and other parts of Alaska. This is key to having a parallel crisis system for behavioral health, as we do for physical health. This funding, which could generate \$6-8 million annually, could help us build out a complete continuum of care for people in behavioral health crisis. This would create a healthier state with Alaskans who are participating successfully in the workforce, with their families, and with their communities.

I urge you to support SB 196.

Sincerely,

Melissa Toffolon, PhD, MPH

Wasilla, Alaska



February 3, 2026

Senator Scott Kawasaki
State Capitol Building Room 119
Juneau, AK 99801

Subject: Support for SB 196 – Sustainable Funding for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

On behalf of the Alaska Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), I am write to express our strong support for Senate Bill 196, which would establish a sustainable funding mechanism for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and related behavioral health crisis response services across Alaska.

As our state continues to confront a growing mental health and substance use crisis, the need for accessible, immediate support has never been greater. The 988 Lifeline offers a critical connection to help for individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts, mental health emergencies, or substance use concerns—by phone, text, or chat at 988lifeline.org. These services save lives.

Why SB 196 Is Urgently Needed:

- Alaska has the highest suicide rate in the country, and Alaska Native and American Indian populations continue to be disproportionately affected, with the highest suicide rates among all racial and ethnic groups nationwide. According to the newest data in 2023, Alaska had the *highest* age-adjusted suicide rate (28.2/100,000) in the United States.
- Careline Alaska, our state's 988 call center, answered over 24,000 calls last year. It was also one of the first centers in the country to join the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline back in 2005, demonstrating Alaska's long-standing leadership in this area.
- SB 196 builds on the Crisis Now framework authorized by SB 124 (2022), which is designed to reduce the burden on law enforcement, emergency departments, and correctional systems, while ensuring that individuals in crisis receive timely and appropriate care.

The legislation allows for flexible grant funding through the Division of Behavioral Health to support local crisis response systems, including:



- Mobile crisis teams
- Careline/988 operations
- 23-hour crisis stabilization centers
- Culturally responsive programs and outreach
- Workforce stabilization efforts

These investments are critical for building a crisis care continuum that meets the unique needs of our diverse communities across Alaska.

AFSP-Alaska Chapter urges passage of SB 196 and help ensure long-term support for Alaska's behavioral health crisis system. Stable funding is essential to maintaining and expanding life-saving services like the 988 Lifeline—and ensuring all Alaskans can access help when they need it most.

Thank you for your commitment to improving behavioral health care and saving lives in Alaska.

Sincerely,

James Biela
POB 3543
Bethel, AK 99559
Advocacy Ambassador AFSP – Alaska Chapter
Vice-Chair National Public Policy AFSP
(907)-545-4675



Brenda McFarlane – Community Response Coordinator

4 February 2026

Senator Scott Kawasaki,

Thank you for this opportunity for the City of Fairbanks Community Response Coordinator to express strong support for Senate Bill 196 to expand crisis service capacity across the state.

The Fairbanks City Council passed [Resolution 5192](#) in November 2025 to ask the Alaska State Legislature to prioritize the development and expansion of a crisis behavioral health system as part of the City of Fairbanks' Legislative Priorities for 2026.

Our community members have been advocating for an alternative to an emergency room or correctional facility for their loved ones for decades. The City of Fairbanks supports Careline Alaska, Mobile Crisis Teams across the state, and the formation of 'No Wrong Door' Crisis Stabilization Centers which accept 100% of referrals from law enforcement, emergency service providers, and the public.

The City has had the distinct privilege of partnering with Alaska Behavioral Health for the provision of Mobile Crisis Team response to citizens in distress for the last 4 years. The team is operated to the full fidelity of the Crisis Now model, integrated with our public safety professionals, and keeps over 88% of community members in their community—diverting them from the hospital and incarceration. We are seeing the fruits of our labor as the Alaska State Troopers are now partnered with the Mobile Crisis Team and the team's call volume is expanding—with 194 calls in December of 2025. This is not the time to lose momentum in the provision of a secure funding source for these services which will eventually save the state money. Every diversion of an individual with Medicaid insurance from an emergency room stay, hospital admission, and possible transfer to the Alaska Psychiatric Institute saves the State of Alaska thousands of dollars.

The City of Fairbanks supports and asks the legislature to continue to support the establishment of crisis services to build capacity for individuals in crisis to be served appropriately in their regions.

Sincerely,

Brenda McFarlane
Community Response Coordinator
Mayor's Office, City of Fairbanks
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Phone: (907) 459-6793 Fax: (907) 459-6710

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Our Mission

To provide support, education and advocacy for people experiencing psychiatric disabilities, their families, friends, and interested community members.

NAMI Fairbanks

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February 2, 2026

Senator Scott Kawasaki
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Senate Finance Committee
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: Support for Senate Bill 196 – Behavioral Health Crisis Services Surcharge

Dear Senator Kawasaki and Members of the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee, and the Senate Finance Committee,

On behalf of NAMI Fairbanks, I write in strong support of Senate Bill 196, which establishes a much-needed behavioral health crisis services surcharge to fund Alaska's Crisis Now framework and 988 response system.

As Alaska faces a dire fiscal climate and ongoing reductions to critical behavioral health and substance use programs, SB 196 offers a sustainable and predictable funding mechanism to ensure that people in crisis receive timely, appropriate care. This is especially critical in our state, which continues to experience some of the highest suicide and opioid-related death rates in the nation.

The flexibility built into this legislation empowers communities like ours to expand mobile crisis response, improve 988 call center services, develop stabilization centers, and invest in culturally responsive outreach. These services are essential to reducing strain on law enforcement, emergency departments, and correctional facilities—while offering more compassionate and effective care.

At NAMI Fairbanks, we see firsthand the gaps in crisis services that leave individuals and families vulnerable. We believe SB 196 is a necessary step forward to strengthen Alaska's behavioral health system and save lives.

Thank you for your leadership on this vital issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nenette Rogers". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Nenette Rogers
Executive Director
NAMI Fairbanks
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February 09, 2026

Senator Kawasaki
State Capitol Bldg.
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for SB 196 – Behavioral Health Crisis Surcharge and Fund

Dear Senator Kawasaki,

My name is Dennis Lasley, and I serve as the Vice President of the Anchorage Police Department Employees Association (APDEA), representing the dedicated professionals who serve in Alaska's largest law enforcement agency. I am also a 911 dispatch supervisor with 17 years of experience in law enforcement, and I speak to you today not just from a professional lens, but as someone with a deep personal commitment to suicide prevention and mental health advocacy.

For over 16 years, I have also served as a volunteer leader with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), helping to build and lead the Alaska Chapter as its founding chair. This unique intersection of professional service and personal advocacy has given me a clear and unwavering understanding: we must do more to divert individuals in behavioral health crisis from law enforcement and toward appropriate, lifesaving care.

The vast majority of mental health crisis calls that come through our dispatch center do not require a law enforcement response. And yet, because of a lack of resources and sustainable funding, police officers are often the default—an approach that is not only ineffective but can be draining for our limited public safety resources and diverts those resources away from their core public safety mission.

SB 196 presents a much-needed, sustainable solution. By establishing a modest \$0.98 monthly surcharge on mobile and landline phones, SB 196 would generate an estimated \$6-8 million annually to support the Crisis Now model statewide. This investment is not only necessary—it is long overdue.

As Alaska faces deep fiscal challenges, with slashed federal support and reductions in our Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery Grants since 2019, we must find ways to build resilience into our behavioral health systems. Alaska continues to have the second-highest rate of adult suicide and the highest rate of teen suicide in the country. Opioid-related deaths in Alaska have spiked while the rest of the country trends downward. We cannot ignore the reality any longer—lives are at stake.



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SB 196 builds upon the promising foundation of HB 172 (2022) by creating predictable, flexible funding for a range of community-tailored services, including:

- Mobile crisis teams to respond with compassion;
- 23-hour crisis stabilization centers to keep people out of jail and emergency rooms;
- Support for the 988 Lifeline and local Careline operations;
- Workforce stabilization to recruit and retain qualified behavioral health professionals;
- Culturally appropriate programs that meet the unique needs of our diverse Alaska communities.

This is not just a policy decision—it is a public safety imperative. It is a moral commitment to ensure Alaskans in crisis receive the right care from the right people at the right time.

I urge you to support SB 196 and provide the leadership necessary to secure long-term, effective, compassionate behavioral health crisis services across Alaska. Our officers, our dispatchers, our communities—and most importantly, those in crisis—are depending on it.

With respect and gratitude,

Dennis Lasley
Vice President, Anchorage Police Department Employees Association
911 Dispatch Supervisor, Anchorage
Founding Chair, AFSP Alaska Chapter



February 6, 2026

To: The Senate Labor & Commerce Committee

Re: **Support for Senate Bill 196:** Strengthening Alaska's Behavioral Health Crisis System

NAMI Alaska strongly supports Senate Bill 196 which would establish a behavioral health crisis services surcharge to provide sustainable funding for Alaska's *Crisis Now* framework and the *988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline*.

As part of our 2026 legislative priorities, we continue to advocate for strengthening crisis intervention resources across Alaska. SB 196 offers a crucial and predictable funding stream that will help ensure Alaskans in crisis receive timely, appropriate, and life-saving care.

At a time when our state faces ongoing reductions in behavioral health funding—and continues to experience some of the highest suicide and opioid-related death rates in the nation—this legislation is a vital step forward. 988 saves lives!

The flexibility in SB 196 allows communities to:

- Expand mobile crisis response teams
- Fund 988 call center operations statewide
- Establish and enhance stabilization centers
- Support culturally responsive outreach and care

These investments will reduce the burden on emergency departments, law enforcement, and correctional facilities—while delivering more compassionate and effective services to those in need.

We see firsthand the devastating impact of gaps in crisis response. SB 196 ensures continued support for essential operations like Careline Alaska, making certain that no Alaskan in crisis is left without help.

Here are more reasons to pass this legislation:

- When it comes to mental health crisis, one call can save a life.
- Just as 911 is universally known for use during emergencies, like a heart attack or car accident, contacting 988 can be lifesaving for people experiencing a mental health crisis.
- Mental health crisis and suicides can be devastating for individuals, families, and communities. When someone experiences a mental health crisis and doesn't receive the

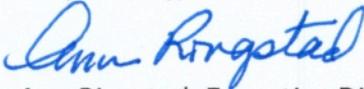
care they need, they can end up in emergency rooms, experience homelessness, become involved in the criminal justice system or worse, lose their life.

- We need to ensure that everyone who experiences a mental health crisis, no matter where they live, received a mental health response. A cornerstone of that response is a 24/7 crisis hotline.
- The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline was established as an easy-to-remember, 3-digit dialing code offering 24/7 crisis support via call, text or chat.
- Directing people to 988 can reduce the need for costly in-person responses to people in need, as many crises can be deescalated over the phone.
- But creating 988 is only the first step. Federal, state and local governments all have a role to play to ensure that there are resources to support 988 and that this universal number is the gateway to a local crisis continuum of care.
- Every person in crisis should have access to not just someone to talk to (988), but someone to respond, and a safe place for help.
- It will take all of us to ensure that the true vision for the 988 Lifeline and a crisis continuum of care is achieved and that we can connect people in crisis to the care they need and deserve.

We urge lawmakers to pass SB 196 this session. This legislation is not only fiscally responsible—it is **life-saving**. It will provide the foundation for a stronger, more responsive behavioral health crisis system in Alaska for generations to come.

Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.

Respectfully,



Ann Ringstad, Executive Director
NAMI Alaska, Inc.