



Alaska Native Health Board

THE VOICE OF ALASKA TRIBAL HEALTH SINCE 1968

■ 907.729.7510 ■ 907.729.7506 • 4000 Ambassador Drive (ANHB Office) • Anchorage, Alaska 99508 • www.anhb.org

ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

ALEUTIAN PIRIBILOF
ISLANDS ASSOCIATION

ARCTIC SLOPE
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

BRISTOL BAY AREA
HEALTH CORPORATION

CHICKALOON VILLAGE
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

CHUGACHMIUT

COPPER RIVER
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

COUNCIL OF ATHABASCAN
TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS

EASTERN ALEUTIAN TRIBES

KARLUK IRA
TRIBAL COUNCIL

KENAITZE INDIAN TRIBE

KETCHIKAN
INDIAN COMMUNITY

KODIAK AREA
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

MANIILAQ ASSOCIATION

METLAKATLA INDIAN
COMMUNITY

MT. SANFORD
TRIBAL CONSORTIUM

NATIVE VILLAGE
OF EKLUTNA

NATIVE VILLAGE OF EYAK

NATIVE VILLAGE
OF TYONEK

NINILCHIK
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

NORTON SOUND
HEALTH CORPORATION

SELDONIA VILLAGE TRIBE

SOUTHCENTRAL
FOUNDATION

SOUTHEAST ALASKA REGIONAL
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

TANANA CHIEFS CONFERENCE

YAKUTAT TLINGIT TRIBE

YUKON-KUSKOKWIM
HEALTH CORPORATION

VALDEZ NATIVE TRIBE

April 25, 2023

The Honorable Bert Stedman
Alaska Senate
Alaska State Capitol, Room 518
Juneau, Alaska 99801

The Honorable Lyman Hoffman
Alaska Senate
Alaska State Capitol, Room 516
Juneau, Alaska 99801

The Honorable Donald Olson
Alaska Senate
Alaska State Capitol, Room 508
Juneau, Alaska 99801

RE: Support for Senate Bill 24 – Youth Mental Health Education

Dear Senate Finance Committee Co-Chairs,

The Alaska Native Health Board (ANHB)¹ writes to the Committee in support of Senate Bill 24 (SB 24), "an act relating to mental health education." Allowing school districts the opportunity to provide age-appropriate mental health education to Alaska's students will offer additional supports to parents, reduce stigma surrounding mental health, and promote resilience within our children and youth in their darkest moments.

Well before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted their lives, young Alaskans have been crying out for help. And recent data confirms this.² Alaska's adolescent suicide rate has long been among the highest in the country, with self-harm deaths among 12-19-year-olds tripling the national average during 2016-2018. For Alaska Native adolescents and youth, the suicide risk was already double that of the general population at 78.9 per 100,000. From 2018 to 2019, that risk for Alaska Native youth nearly doubled. The regions most impacted by youth suicide are also predominantly Alaska Native, the Northern and Southwest regions (116.1 and 112.5 per 100,000 persons aged 12–19 years, respectively).

In 2019, suicide was the leading cause of death for Alaskans aged 15-24, and 22% of high school students reported having planned a suicide attempt in the previous year. In just a decade, the rise in suicidal ideation among Alaska teens has been

¹ ANHB was established in 1968 with the purpose of promoting the spiritual, physical, mental, social, and cultural well-being and pride of Alaska Native people. ANHB is the statewide voice on Alaska Native health issues and is the advocacy organization for the Alaska Tribal Health System (ATHS), which is comprised of tribal health programs that serve all of the 229 Tribes and 180,000 Alaska Native and American Indian people throughout the state. As the statewide tribal health advocacy organization, ANHB helps Alaska's Tribes and Tribal programs achieve effective consultation and communication with state and federal agencies on matters of concern.

² Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Section of Epidemiology. "Adolescent Suicide Death, AKVDRS Update – Alaska, 2016–2019". Bulletin No 5, Sept. 25, 2020. Accessed March 30, 2023, http://www.epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/b2020_05.pdf.

alarming, with planning rates up 100% for male students and 80% for female students (2009-2019). Now, initial 2020 reports are that suicide attempts among 11-to-14-year-olds have increased. Yet despite all this data, the loss of our young people around the state cannot be measured. Mental health is an essential part of overall health, a fact only underscored by this pandemic. Allowing local communities the choice to provide a more complete health curriculum is one clear step we can take towards ensuring our youth seek support when they need it most.

Youth are raising their voices for help, and it is time we listen. ANHB thanks you for your work thus far and we offer our support of SB 24 to better support our young people. If you have any comments or questions, you may contact ANHB by email at anhb@anhb.org or by telephone at (907) 729-7510.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wm Smith".

William Smith, Chairman
Alaska Native Health Board
Tribally-Elected Leader of the Valdez Native Tribe