

February 26, 2024

Rep. Mike Prax, Chair
Health and Social Services Committee
Alaska House of Representatives
Sent via email

Re: Support for HB343- School District Medical Assistance

Dear Chair Prax,

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (Trust) supports HB343, which would increase access to school-based health and behavioral health services for Alaska's Medicaid-eligible youth.

The Trust is committed to improving the lives of our beneficiaries. Two of the Trust's established priorities are early childhood intervention & prevention and improving access to mental health services. In 2020, the Alaska Mental Health Trust funded a state-wide, two-phase landscape analysis to identify mental health supports in schools. The conclusion of the [Phase Two report](#) noted that school districts across Alaska are responding to an increasing level of student need but that sustainable funding sources and policy changes were needed to help districts address mental health supports in schools. The report identifies sustainability through Medicaid due to the high percentage of Alaska's youth that make up our Medicaid-eligible population, however, notes the limitation that only behavioral health services included in an IEP would be covered.

By removing the disability and IEP criteria for school-based Medicaid services, these bills will increase access to healthcare services for children and will increase flexibility for schools to seek reimbursement for school-based services for Medicaid-eligible children. As such, it will expand services for a broader range of children and youth and help improve health outcomes by promoting early intervention and prevention services. If passed, this legislation would also support families by creating more options for parent-directed care in a school setting. Lastly, this legislation intersects with ongoing efforts focused on improved behavioral health crisis care by providing services to children with lower acuity, which may prevent a behavioral health condition from escalating to a crisis. Thank you for your consideration and your leadership in this important matter.

Sincerely,



Steve Williams,
Chief Executive Officer

Cc Members, House Health and Social Services Committee
Heidi Hedberg, Commissioner, Department of Health