



March 6, 2018

Representative Les Gara  
State Capitol, Room 511  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Gara,

Please accept this letter of support for a budget amendment of \$10.5 million from FY19–21 to allow the State of Alaska to claim an additional \$10.5 million in federal DSH funds. These funds would support services to Alaskans with acute and serious mental health needs.

Alaska currently claims all of the DSH funds to which Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) is entitled. DHSS proposes to claim a portion of the State's unused DSH funds to support the hospitals and community behavioral health programs most impacted by the lack of an adequate number of treatment beds at API. API's lack of beds has severely overtaxed hospital emergency departments, which are holding patients who are court-ordered for psychiatric evaluation and treatment for days or longer. One hospital recently reported holding ten patients awaiting transfer to API in a 16-bed emergency department.

With a commitment of \$10.5 million in ACHI funds from FY19-21, the state could enhance DSH funded services by a total of \$21 million. This would enable the Legislature to quickly enhance the current capabilities of the State's three DSH-funded, hospital-based mental health treatment programs and provide new financial support to three additional hospitals whose emergency departments have been impacted by API's capacity constraints.

These hospitals have been working hard to maintain a safe and caring environment for patients, but the situation has reached a critical point. Additional funding could pay for services to support patients and relieve stress on the health care system. Services could include physician and social work services, security guards, substance use or mental health services (assessments, evaluations), discharge planning capacity, renovated ED rooms, etc., all geared towards providing more appropriate services for the mentally ill and relieving stress and pressure on emergency departments. This enhanced DSH funding approach would enable the State to help address a demonstrated crisis in the provision of adequate and appropriate hospital-level care for Alaskans experiencing a mental health crisis.

Thank you for your efforts on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Becky Hultberg, President/CEO