

# Alaska Chapter

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American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



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March 20, 2025

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Wesley Gifford, MD, FAAP

120 4<sup>th</sup> Street

Juneau, AK 99801

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RE: Support for Senate Bill 90 – Behavioral Health Treatment Consent

**Executive Director**

Dale Knutsen

PO Box 110573

Anchorage, AK 99511

(907) 317-1397

aapalaskachapter@gmail.com

Dear Senator Giessel,

The American Academy of Pediatrics, Alaska Chapter offers our strong support for Senate Bill 90, which would allow 16 and 17 year-olds the ability to self-consent for up to five behavioral health treatment sessions. Our pediatricians see the need for increased access to behavioral health supports for teens.

Senate Bill 90 removes the one potential barrier to access to care by giving individuals the ability to self-consent for their own treatment, which is important in situations where it might be challenging to obtain parental consent. This legislation acknowledges the wide variety of circumstances our Alaskan youth find themselves in by carefully navigating the importance of parents in the treatment process while also affirming and empowering 16 and 17 year-olds seeking behavioral health treatment.

According to KIDS COUNT 2024, 2 out of every 5 high school students in Alaska report feeling persistently sad or hopeless for an extended period during the previous year. This number has moved steadily upward since 2009, increasing almost 60% in the past decade. In our practices, we see an ever-increasing number of teens who need behavioral health supports and treatment.

Senate Bill 90 seeks to increase youth access to behavioral health services by balancing youth autonomy with parental involvement, supporting Alaska's youth as they seek treatment for their health and wellbeing.

We appreciate you bringing this legislation forward.

Sincerely,

Anna Ogena, MD, FAAP

Jody Butto, MD, FAAP

Benjamin Westley, MD, FAAP, FACP, FIDSA

Patricia Clay, MD, FAAP

Westley Gifford, MD, FAAP

Jennifer Austin, APRN



**American  
Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention**

Alaska

March 24, 2025

Senator Cathy Giessel- Alaska State Legislature

**Re: Support for SB 90 - An Act Relating to the Examination and Treatment of Minors**

Dear Senator Giessel

I am writing on behalf of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - Alaska Chapter to express our strong support for Senate Bill 90 (SB 90), which seeks to empower minors aged 16 and older to independently consent to receive behavioral and mental health services. As an organization dedicated to preventing suicide and promoting mental health, we believe that SB 90 provides an important step toward addressing the mental health needs of young Alaskans.

Suicide is a leading cause of death among Alaska's youth, and the barriers to accessing timely mental health care must be addressed. The provisions within SB 90 will help remove some of those barriers by allowing minors aged 16 and older to consent to outpatient behavioral or mental health services for up to five appointments, each lasting no longer than 90 minutes. This will allow young people who may be struggling with mental health concerns to receive immediate care, without unnecessary delays, at a critical time in their lives.

We appreciate that SB 90 recognizes the importance of parental involvement in a minor's care. The bill includes an important safeguard that ensures a mental health provider may not prescribe medication without the consent of a minor's parent or guardian. Moreover, upon reaching the fifth appointment, the mental health provider, in consultation with their supervisor if applicable, will evaluate whether obtaining parental consent would be detrimental to the minor's well-being. This thoughtful provision ensures that the minor's best interests are prioritized, especially when the need for treatment may be urgent and sensitive.

This bill strikes a necessary balance between empowering minors to take charge of their mental health and ensuring that appropriate oversight is maintained when it comes to more intensive treatment such as medication. It also offers the flexibility needed for young people to begin receiving care while maintaining the support of mental health professionals to determine the most appropriate next steps for their well-being.

We believe SB 90, can create a more accessible, responsive mental health care system for young people in Alaska and ensure that those who need help are able to seek it without fear of stigma or delay.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and for your continued service to the people of Alaska.

Sincerely,

James Biela  
Advocacy Ambassador – AFSP Alaska Chapter  
Co-Chair Public Policy Board  
907-545-4675

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
2440 E. Tudor #191 | Anchorage, AK 99507  
[afsp.org/alaska](https://afsp.org/alaska) | [alaska@afsp.org](mailto:alaska@afsp.org)  
Tax ID 13-3393329



# Alaska Native Health Board

THE VOICE OF ALASKA TRIBAL HEALTH SINCE 1968

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March 28, 2025

Transmitted via email: [Senator.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov](mailto:Senator.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov)

The Honorable Cathy Giessel  
Senator, District E  
Alaska Legislature  
State Capitol Room 121  
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: ANHB Support for SB 90 Minor Mental Health: Age of Consent

Dear Senator Giessel,

On behalf of the Tribal Behavioral Health Directors (TBHD) Subcommittee, the Alaska Native Health Board (ANHB)<sup>1</sup> writes in support of Senate Bill (SB) 90, which seeks to enhance access to critical behavioral health, medical, and dental services for youth in Alaska. TBHD represents large and small, rural and urban Tribal behavioral health and substance use treatment programs working together to provide a comprehensive continuum of behavioral health care in Alaska. Behavioral health care for youth is a top priority for the State of Alaska and Tribal Health. This legislation will ensure that youth, particularly those in crisis, can access the care they need when they need it.

SB 90 addresses a significant gap in health care accessibility by allowing youth 16 and older to access services independently for up to five visits. This provision acknowledges the real-world challenges faced by many Alaskan youth, including those whose parent or guardian may not be immediately accessible due to circumstances such as work obligations, experiencing housing instability, travel barriers, multigenerational living situations, or parental struggles with behavioral and mental health challenges, including substance use disorders (SUD) and opioid use disorders (OUD). This legislation can help prevent situations where a young person in crisis's motivation to seek treatment wanes by the time a provider can reach their parent or guardian, leading to unmet health care needs and potential escalation of crises.

Furthermore, SB 90 supports the success of school-based Medicaid services, which serve as a critical access point for many students. Schools are often the first line of defense in identifying and addressing behavioral health concerns,

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<sup>1</sup> ANHB was established in 1968 to promote 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 over 234,000 Alaska Native and American Indian people throughout the state. As the statewide Tribal health advocacy organization, ANHB supports Alaska's Tribes and Tribal programs to achieve effective consultation and communication with state and federal agencies on matters of concern.

ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL  
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

ALEUTIAN PRIBILOF  
ISLANDS ASSOCIATION

ARCTIC SLOPE  
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

BRISTOL BAY AREA  
HEALTH CORPORATION

CHICKALOON VILLAGE  
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

CHUGACHMIUT

COPPER RIVER  
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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

SELDOVIA VILLAGE TRIBE

SOUTHCENTRAL  
FOUNDATION

SOUTHEAST ALASKA REGIONAL  
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

TANANA CHIEFS CONFERENCE

YAKUTAT TLINGIT TRIBE

YUKON-KUSKOKWIM  
HEALTH CORPORATION

VALDEZ NATIVE TRIBE

yet the current consent requirements can delay or obstruct timely intervention. This bill will facilitate a more streamlined process, ensuring that paperwork is not why students can't access the needed services.

The growing behavioral health crisis among Alaskan youth underscores the need for this legislation. National data indicates that nearly 50% of adolescents with a mental health condition do not receive treatment, often due to barriers such as consent requirements and administrative burden. Additionally, language barriers (e.g., medical terminology and non-English speaking families) further complicate access to care. Reducing these barriers aligns with best practices for early intervention and crisis prevention, ultimately improving health outcomes and reducing the long-term societal and economic costs associated with untreated mental health conditions.

SB 90 does not infringe upon parental rights but ensures youth can access necessary care without unnecessary delays. It strikes a balance between safeguarding parental involvement and recognizing the realities of youth in crisis in Alaska, reinforcing due process protections while addressing public health needs.

Importantly, SB 90 does not infringe upon Tribal sovereignty. Tribal health organizations will retain their authority to implement policies and practices that align with their governance structures. This bill complements the existing healthcare framework by expanding access without altering the autonomy of Tribal health entities.

ANHB appreciates the opportunity to support legislation that promotes access to behavioral health, medical, and dental services for Alaska's youth. If you have any comments or questions regarding our recommendations in this letter, please contact ANHB at [anhb@anhb.org](mailto:anhb@anhb.org) or via telephone (907) 729-7510.

Sincerely,

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

Chief William F. Smith, Chairman  
Alaska Native Health Board