

March 13, 2024

RE: HB 202 Letter of Support

Dear Members of the House Education Committee,

The joint mission of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA) and the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) is to advocate for programs and services that promote healthy, independent, productive Alaskans. AMHB/ABADA are statutorily charged with advising, planning, and coordinating behavioral health services and programs funded by the State of Alaska.

The Boards enthusiastically support HB 202, Opioid Overdose Drugs in Schools, a vital piece of legislation mandating the availability of naloxone in schools. This bill addresses a critical public health concern by proactively safeguarding the well-being of students, staff, and visitors in educational institutions. The opioid crisis poses a significant challenge in our communities, affecting individuals across all demographics. Given the potential for opioid overdoses in various settings, including schools, it is imperative that decisive action is taken to ensure a swift and effective response in emergencies.

Naloxone is a life-saving medication capable of reversing the effects of opioid overdose, providing a crucial window for seeking emergency medical assistance. Requiring schools to have naloxone on hand empowers educators, staff, and administrators to respond promptly and effectively to opioid emergencies, potentially saving lives. This legislation also acknowledges the unpredictable nature of opioid overdoses and the importance of being prepared to respond swiftly. Ensuring naloxone is readily available in schools equips educational institutions to address emergencies on the premises, during school-sponsored events, or while students are in transit. By incorporating naloxone into the emergency response toolkit of schools, we send a clear message that the safety and well-being of our students are paramount.

The Board respectfully requests that HB 202 be amended to reference "opioid overdose reversal medications¹" instead of a specific formulation like Naloxone. In this ever-changing landscape, flexibility in statutory language can prevent the need for future legislation due to changes in available medications.

Additionally, the Board kindly requests a hearing on HB 202 to further discuss and underscore the importance of this legislation in promoting the safety and well-being of our school communities. Thank you for considering our comments and granting an opportunity for further dialogue.

Sincerely,



James Savage, Chair
Alaska Mental Health Board



Renee Schofield, Chair
Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/WH-Guide-to-Save-Lives-from-Overdose.pdf>