



January 29, 2025

Senator Forrest Dunbar, Chair
Senate Health & Social Services
Senate.Health.And.Social.Services@akleg.gov

Ben Jones, J.D., Director of Legal and Policy Initiatives, Lives in the Balance

Re: Support of SB 44, Protecting Alaska's Children

Dear Sen. Dunbar, Chair, and Senate Health & Social Services Committee members:

My name is Ben Jones and I am the Director of Legal and Policy Initiatives at Lives in the Balance, a national non-profit organization that advocates for our most vulnerable kids, and helps caregivers intervene in evidence-based ways that are collaborative, proactive, non-punitive, non-exclusionary, and effective.

We write in support of SB 44 to shine a light onto psychiatric hospitals, holding them accountable to both the state and to families. We have worked with staff in schools and treatment facilities across the country and see firsthand the importance of reporting dangerous practices, so that we can measure the effectiveness of safe alternatives. The use of these practices, including restraint and seclusion, is a red flag that something is not working.

SB 44 adds protections for child-patients and provides additional oversight of locked facilities. One, it ensures an opportunity for confidential video communication between children and parent/guardian. Two, it requires unannounced inspections of facilities by licensing authorities, with inspectors interviewing at least 50% of child-patients. Three, facilities would be required to report uses of restraint and seclusion to the state and to parent/guardian within one day of use.

Families and the state deserve to know what is happening to children when they are confined to a psychiatric hospital. This issue has heightened importance for its civil rights implications and disproportionate impacts - around 17% of the state are Alaska Native, but a third of the children who received state funding for residential psychiatric treatment were Alaska Native.

We urge you to vote in favor of SB 44. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "BJ", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ben Jones, J.D.



Dot Lake Village
President

PO Box 70488
Fairbanks, AK 99707

(907) 347-1251
tracy.charles-smith@dotlakevillage.org
www.dotlakevillage.org

February 12, 2025

Senator Matt Claman
State Capitol, Room 429
Juneau, AK
99801

Senator Claman,

As the President of the Native Village of Dot Lake, AK. I offer you this letter of support for Senate Bill 44. This bill will go a long way in protecting our children in the state of Alaska.

As a tribal leader, it is my duty to serve my tribal members who have duly elected me, you as an elected leader are doing the same thing to protect our youth.

You have my full support on this bill to introduce reforms in the care of our children who need behavioral health treatment.

Thank you for your efforts to protect all children in Alaska and help protect them from harm. Please continue your efforts to provide better behavioral health treatment to our children.

Sincerely,

Tracy Charles-Smith
President
Dot Lake Village