



February 26, 2025

House Education Committee
Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for House Bill 105 - Public Schools: Mental Health Education

Dear House Education Committee,

Alaska Children's Trust offers our strong support for House Bill 105, which would provide guidance to schools around mental health education. As the statewide lead organization focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect, we support policies that promote the health and well-being of Alaska's children and families. House Bill 105 does this by supporting schools who choose to include mental wellness as part of their health education curriculum.

House Bill 105 allows local communities the choice and opportunity to offer a more complete health curriculum. The mental health pressures facing youth today are numerous, from challenges navigating social media to the lasting impacts of the pandemic. Mental health and wellness are essential components of overall health. Just as youth are taught how to maintain physical health and well-being, they should also have the opportunity to learn how to maintain mental health and well-being. This legislation would support parents, reduce stigma around mental health, and provide children and youth developmentally appropriate knowledge and resources about mental health.

According to KIDS COUNT data, in the last decade the proportion of students feeling sad or hopeless has increased by 59%. Suicide was the leading cause of death for Alaskans aged 15 to 24 in 2019. And in 2023, 21% of high school students reported having planned a suicide attempt in the previous year.

House Bill 105 would supply youth with greater opportunity to access the knowledge and resources they need to care for their overall health, including their mental health. Supporting students in this generation is important for strengthening the parents of the next generation and generations to come. Thank you for considering this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Trevor J. Storrs
President & CEO
Alaska Children's Trust



American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention

Alaska

February 27, 2025

Dear Members of the House of Education Committee

RE: SUPPORT House Bill 105 Public Schools: Mental Health Education

The Alaska Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) offers our strong support for House Bill 105, which would require public schools to develop guidelines around integrating mental health into existing health curriculum.

Suicide was the leading cause of death for Alaskans aged 10 to 24 in 2022. Alaska Natives and American Indians consistently have the highest suicide rates of any racial and ethnic group in the U.S.

As the lead statewide organization focused on suicide prevention, AFSP-Alaska supports policies that promote the health and well-being of Alaska's children and families. House Bill 105 does this by supporting schools to include mental wellness to offer a more complete health education curriculum. The mental health pressures facing youth today are numerous, from challenges navigating social media to the lasting impacts of the pandemic. Just as youth are taught how to maintain physical health and well-being, they should also learn how to maintain mental health and well-being. This legislation would support parents, reduce stigma around mental health, and provide children and youth developmentally appropriate knowledge and resources about mental health.

In 2023, 21% of Alaskan high school students reported having planned a suicide attempt in the previous year. Let's hope our students never again have to reach this devastating level of crisis. House Bill 105 would supply youth with greater access to the knowledge and resources they need to care for their overall health, including their mental health. Supporting students in this generation is important for strengthening the parents of the next generation and generations to come. Thank you for sponsoring this important piece of legislation and staying dedicated to saving lives.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Biela", written over a white background.

James Biela

Advocacy Ambassador AFSP – Alaska Chapter

Co-Chair National Public Policy AFSP

(907)-545-4675

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
2440 E. Tudor #191 | Anchorage, AK 99507
afsp.org/alaska | alaska@afsp.org
Tax ID 13-3393329



NAMI
National Alliance on Mental Illness

Alaska

February 24, 2025

House Education Committee members
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear House Education Committee members,

NAMI Alaska strongly supports HB 105 – ‘Mental Health Education’. This is a crucial step in providing school districts across the state with the guidance they need to address mental health education for their students. NAMI Alaska is in full support of this legislation.

Mental and physical health are deeply interconnected. One in six youth in the U.S. aged 6-17 experiences a mental health disorder each year, with half of all mental health conditions beginning by age fourteen. Addressing mental health early can significantly improve long-term outcomes for our youth. HB 105 establishes a necessary framework for schools to develop culturally and developmentally appropriate mental health education guidelines for their districts.

Educators, counselors, and school staff are often the first to recognize when a student is struggling. Sometimes, it only takes one trusted adult to make all the difference in a young person’s life. Early recognition, education, and intervention can prevent more severe challenges later in life. HB 105 ensures that the State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Education and Early Development and key stakeholders, establishes high-level guidelines while allowing districts the flexibility to tailor curricula to their local needs.

By implementing statewide mental health education guidelines, HB 105 will help reduce stigma surrounding mental illness, equip students with essential knowledge about their own mental health, and encourage open conversations about well-being. Creating an environment where students feel safe discussing their struggles will lead to earlier interventions and stronger support systems.

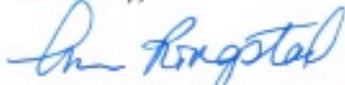
NAMI Alaska is committed to working alongside the Department of Education, the Alaska Department of Health, the Alaska Department of Family and Community Services, and regional tribal health organizations to develop these guidelines over the next two years. Our mission is to ensure that every student has access to age-appropriate mental health education, empowering them with the tools to recognize signs of mental distress and seek appropriate help.

Strengthening mental health education guidelines for Alaska's public schools will provide critical support for students, teachers, and administrators. Mental and physical health go hand-in-hand. Schools should be encouraged to integrate mental health alongside physical health in K-12 education. Taking this step will help create a future where students are not only aware of mental health challenges but are also empowered to seek help without fear or stigma.

Now more than ever, it is essential to take action to address mental health and provide guidance and hope to those affected by these issues. Let's give schools the resources they need to help their students navigate mental health challenges.

In summary, NAMI Alaska fully supports HB 105 and urges its swift passage. Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Ann Ringstad, Executive Director
NAMI Alaska, Inc.



February 25, 2025

Re: Support for HB 105 & SB 41, Mental Health Education

Dear Members of the House Education Committee:

On behalf of VOA Alaska I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 105, which seeks to integrate mental health education into Alaska's K-12 health curriculum. This legislation is a critical step in addressing the youth mental health crisis by equipping students with essential knowledge, skills, and resources to support their well-being.

As an organization dedicated to behavioral health services for Alaskan youth, we see firsthand the urgent need for increased mental health awareness and early intervention. Alaska has the second highest rate of youth suicide in the nation, with the sharpest increase occurring among children ages 11–14. At VOA Alaska, we are witnessing alarming increases in self-harm and suicidal ideation among the youth we serve. Our kids are struggling, and the need for proactive solutions has never been greater.

HB 105 is more than just mental health education—it is prevention. By incorporating developmentally appropriate instruction on mental health, this bill will:

- **Reduce stigma** and normalize conversations around mental well-being.
- **Encourage help-seeking behaviors**, ensuring students know how and where to access support.
- **Teach self-care, wellness, and coping strategies**, empowering students to navigate stress and emotions in healthy ways.
- **Foster peer support and awareness**, helping students recognize when their friends may need help and how to respond.
- **Save lives** by promoting early intervention and connection to resources before a crisis occurs.

HB 105 aligns with best practices in behavioral health and education, ensuring that mental health is addressed with the same level of importance as physical health in Alaska's schools. By developing clear guidelines in collaboration with mental health professionals, educators, tribal health organizations, and state agencies, this bill will help create a supportive learning environment where students can thrive both academically and emotionally.

We commend Representative Galvin and Senator Gray-Jackson for championing this important legislation and urge lawmakers to prioritize its passage. VOA Alaska stands ready to support these efforts and look forward to partnering with the Department of Education and Early Development to help ensure its successful implementation.



Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the health and well-being of Alaska's youth. We strongly encourage the passage of HB 105 and appreciate your consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julia Luey', is positioned above the typed name.

Julia Luey
President & CEO
VOA Alaska
jluey@voaak.org
907-279-9640



Alaska Native Health Board

THE VOICE OF ALASKA TRIBAL HEALTH SINCE 1968

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ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL
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HEALTH CORPORATION

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CHUGACHMIUT

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NATIVE ASSOCIATION

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KARLUK IRA
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KETCHIKAN
INDIAN COMMUNITY

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SELDOVIA VILLAGE TRIBE

SOUTHCENTRAL
FOUNDATION

SOUTHEAST ALASKA REGIONAL
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

TANANA CHIEFS CONFERENCE

YAKUTAT TLINGIT TRIBE

YUKON-KUSKOKWIM
HEALTH CORPORATION

VALDEZ NATIVE TRIBE

April 1, 2025

Transmitted via email : Representative.Alyse.Galvin@akleg.gov

The Honorable Alyse Galvin
Representative, District 14
Alaska Legislature
State Capitol Room 502
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: ANHB Support for HB 105 Public Schools Mental Health Education

Dear Representative Galvin,

The Alaska Native Health Board (ANHB)¹ writes to express strong support on behalf of the Tribal Behavioral Health Directors subcommittee for House Bill (HB) 105), which ensures that Alaska's K-12 schools can develop mental health education curricula with input from key stakeholders while maintaining transparency and parental involvement. 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. Mental health is essential to overall well-being, yet many students lack the knowledge and resources to understand and manage their emotional health. HB 105 empowers schools to provide structured, age-appropriate instruction that helps students develop resilience and coping strategies.

Early education on mental health fosters resilience, coping strategies, and awareness that will benefit students throughout their lives. Normalizing conversations around mental health in schools will create an environment of acceptance and encourage individuals to seek help when needed. Given the significant impact of mental health on academic success and overall well-being, equipping students with this knowledge is essential for their long-term success and the health of our communities.

Alaska faces significant mental health challenges, with youth suicide rates among the highest in the nation and rising levels of anxiety and depression among school-aged children. Early education on mental health can help identify concerns before

¹ 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.

they escalate, equipping students with the skills to manage stress and seek support when needed. Integrating mental health education into schools is a proactive step toward improving long-term health outcomes.

HB 105 allows school districts, in consultation with Tribal Health Organizations, the Department of Health, the Department of Family and Community Services, and other stakeholders, to design mental health education that reflects the needs of their communities. It also ensures that local school boards notify parents and provide opportunities for engagement, strengthening community support for these initiatives.

Tribal Health Organizations are essential providers of behavioral health services across Alaska, serving Tribal and non-Tribal residents, particularly in rural and remote areas where access to care is limited. Expanding mental health education aligns with ongoing efforts to improve health outcomes and ensure that young people have the resources to navigate challenges and thrive.

We urge the Legislature to advance HB 105 and support mental health education in Alaska's schools. This legislation represents a critical step toward fostering healthier, more resilient communities for generations.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the well-being of Alaska's youth. If you have any comments or questions regarding this letter, please contact ANHB at anhb@anhb.org or via telephone (907) 729-7510.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W F Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Chief William F. Smith, Chairman
Alaska Native Health Board



ND SYSTEMS

Mental Health & Counseling

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March 14, 2025

Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
120 4th Street
State Capitol Room 30
Juneau AK, 99801

Representative Alyss Galvin
120 4th Street
State Capitol Room 502
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Senator Gray Jackson and Representative Galvin,

Thank you for introducing Senate Bill 41 and the companion of House Bill 105:
"An Act relating to mental health education."

As an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) specializing as a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) with a specific focus of care for children and young people, I am in support of SB 41 and HB 105.

I offer care through ND Systems Inc., a private outpatient mental health practice in three Alaskan communities, Anchorage, Fairbanks and Kenai. Our team of PMHNP's, Masters in Social Work and Master's in Education with a focus in counseling, serve these communities. ND Systems revenues are 57% generated from Medicaid and Medicare. We work closely with our communities Office of Children Services and Guardian ad Litem. We are in a unique position to see how an expanded education that brings a common language and understanding to how the brain and mind works through a well-developed and well-grounded mental health education would be helpful to our communities.

Many of the children and young people that we serve do not have a good understanding of the language or definition of mental health as a subject and neither do their family members. What is universally clear, is that families are keen to help improve the wellbeing of their children. Having a well grounded and vetted curriculum that respects culture, community and family ways of knowing, will serve our children well and perhaps improve communication within our communities.

Again thank you for the introduction of this legislation and both your commitment and courage serving our communities and children.

Respectfully,

Teresa Lyons, APRN, PMHNP
CEO ND Systems, Inc.
(907) 460-1868 (personal cellphone number)

Fairbanks

Kenai

Anchorage

Telehealth Available





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