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February 4, 2011

Senator Bettye Davis
State Capitol, Room 30
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: Letter of Support for SB 8

Dear Senator Davis:

Thank you for introducing SB 8: *An Act Relating to Questionnaires and Surveys Administered in the Public Schools*. The Alaska Network on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault is committed to prevention efforts and serving victims of violence. This bill can help. SB 8 will provide a valuable tool in our efforts to understand the prevalence and shared risks of youth experiencing violence, while retaining a family's rights to remove their child from participating in the survey and allow a key segment of the student population, often the most vulnerable students, to participate in the survey.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Youth Risk Behavioral Survey (YRBS) is used nationally, and within Alaska, to determine risk behaviors among the Alaska high school student population. CDC developed YRBS data is a credible data source that can be compared to national data. This survey covers a broad range of risk behaviors and streamlines information gathering and administering surveys in the schools. However, currently with our opt-in YRBS policies, many communities, and sometimes our state, have struggled to have enough responses to consider the data valid.

This information and data is essential to help educators, health workers, social service agencies, victim service programs, and other allied professionals to better serve our communities. This data helps teachers working on prevention education to determine the best age to teach various skills and health topics in their classrooms. This data also helps organizations seeking resources to advocate for real needs in their communities as well as assisting health practitioners and others to determine how to best approach students with co-occurring risk behaviors.

Within the field of domestic and sexual violence prevention, current YRBS data indicates that in traditional high schools, more than 17% of 12th grade students have experienced physical violence in a dating relationship and more than 11.5% have been forced to have sexual intercourse. We also know that in alternative schools, these numbers are 22.6% and 21.9%. While these numbers are staggering, they are incomplete, due to the current opt-out YRBS policies, with many of the most vulnerable students failing to return permission forms.

Member Programs

Anchorage AWAIC, STAR Barrow AWIC Bethel TWC Cordova CFRC Dillingham SAFE
Fairbanks IAC Homer SPHH Juneau AWARE Kenai LeeShore Center Ketchikan WISH Kodiak KWRCC
Kotzebue MFCC Nome BSWG Sitka SAFV Unalaska USAFV Valdez AVV

This bill is also very timely and in line with Governor Parnell's initiative to end domestic and sexual violence in our state in the next 10 years. One of the key strategies to ending the violence is by focusing on primary prevention efforts that employs various strategies to stop perpetration of violence, *before it ever occurs*. To achieve this, the Governor has brought together a multi-disciplinary group of allied professionals from communities throughout Alaska to look at the current gaps in the data needed to reach our primary prevention goals. SB 8 will help to fill ones of those gaps.

Thank you for bringing forth a bill that will provide a low cost way to better understand the scope of teen dating and sexual violence in Alaska and will assist in strengthening our violence prevention efforts.

Sincerely,



Peggy Brown
Executive Director

cc: Lisa Mariotti, Policy Director
Lori Grassgreen, Director of Prevention Projects