

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STATEWIDE SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL

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January 20, 2012

Senator Bettye Davis
State Capitol Room 30
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Letter of Support for Senate Bill 137 – Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training

Dear Senator Davis,

On behalf of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, I express support for SB 137, a Jason Flatt Act, requiring two hours of training for certain educators and school personnel. As you know, one of the groups of Alaskans most at risk for suicide are youth age 15-24.¹ To connect with this high-risk group, suicide prevention must be part of the education system.

Research shows that, when educators and staff are equipped with the skills and support to identify when a student is at risk and properly intervene, lives are saved. This is why the Council endorsed the state suicide prevention strategy mandating training for **all school district personnel**. Children and youth interact with more than just their teachers at school -- coaches, cafeteria staff, maintenance staff, librarians, and others all have the chance to support a student and save a life. By requiring suicide prevention training, SB 137 will help ensure that youth experiencing depression, hopelessness, and other risk factors associated with suicide are identified and connected with the help they need before they attempt suicide.

There are many resources available to support this effort. Some are even available at little or no cost to school districts. The Jason Foundation offers training and resources for school personnel at no cost to the school or teachers. The Division of Behavioral Health offers Gatekeeper trainings, also at no cost. In the FY13 proposed budget, there is funding to support a three year pilot for evidence-based training through a web-based program. Kognito Interactive offers interactive online training, At-Risk, for high school and university educators and staff (as well as other health education training).

The Council supports SB 137 and the policy of requiring suicide awareness and prevention training for school personnel. We thank you for your work on behalf of Alaskans, especially our youth.

Sincerely,



J. Kate Burkhart
Executive Director

cc: William Martin, Chairman

¹ The age-adjusted rate of suicide for young men age 15-24 in Alaska between 2000-2009 was 56.1/100,000.