



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

Alaska

January 28, 2026

The Honorable Lōki Tobin
Alaska State Senate
State Capitol Room 115
120 4th Street
Juneau AK, 99801

RE: Support for SB 206 "An Act relating to reports of harassment, intimidation, or bullying in schools; relating to parental notification of incidents of harassment, intimidation, or bullying involving students and threats of suicide by students; and establishing the firearm safe storage grant fund."

Dear Senator Lōki Tobin:

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) Alaska Chapter writes in strong support of SB 206 to establish a statewide firearm safe storage grant fund and awareness initiative for Alaska schools. This legislation will help make lifesaving education a core component of firearm ownership and safety, reaching Alaska communities and homes where firearms are present and helping protect youth and families from firearm suicide.

We know that the risk of suicide increases when lethal means are readily accessible. When we talk about preventing suicide, we must also talk about firearm safety. Suicide is complex and never the result of a single factor. Mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders—particularly when unaddressed—can increase suicide risk. That risk is significantly elevated when a firearm is accessible in the home.

Firearms are the most commonly used and most lethal method of suicide. Approximately 85–90 percent of suicide attempts involving a firearm result in death. In Alaska, firearms account for the majority of suicide deaths, and the state continues to experience firearm suicide rates that rank among the highest in the nation.

CDC Alaska-specific data show that in 2023, Alaska ranked among the top states for firearm suicide rates overall and had the fifth highest gun death rate in the country. Alaska also had the highest firearm suicide rate among American Indian and Alaska Native people, reflecting persistent and severe disparities that require focused, culturally responsive prevention strategies.

Firearm-related deaths also affect Alaska's children and families. According to CDC mortality data, firearms were the leading cause of death among Alaska youth ages 1 to 17 from 2019 to 2023. In addition, Alaska continues to experience a high number of domestic violence-related homicides involving firearms, increasing the lethality of these incidents and reinforcing the importance of safe firearm storage and education.

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



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Since 2016, AFSP has partnered nationally with the National Shooting Sports Foundation to produce and distribute firearm suicide prevention and secure storage education materials through more than 8,000 industry partners, including firearm retailers, ranges, and instructors. SB 206 would expand access to these evidence-based materials across Alaska, ensuring that firearm owners and families receive consistent, practical guidance on secure storage and suicide prevention.

Research consistently shows that increasing time and distance between a person at risk and a lethal method can save lives. When individuals experiencing a suicidal crisis are unable to access their chosen method, most do not go on to attempt suicide using another method. Temporary, voluntary secure storage during periods of heightened risk provides critically important time for crises to de-escalate and for intervention and support to occur.

AFSP is the leading national not-for-profit organization exclusively dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. Our Alaska Chapter carries out this mission statewide through education, advocacy, and community engagement. We firmly believe SB 206 will strengthen Alaska's suicide prevention efforts and help prevent the tragic and preventable loss of life.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the safety and well-being of Alaskans.

Sincerely,
James Biela
AFSP – Alaska Advocacy Ambassador
Vice-Chair, AFSP National Public Policy Council
907-545-4675

Endnotes (Alaska-Specific Sources Only)

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). WISQARS Fatal Injury Reports: Firearm Suicide and Firearm Deaths — Alaska, 2019–2023.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). WISQARS Fatal Injury Data by Race/Ethnicity — Alaska American Indian/Alaska Native Populations.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). WISQARS Leading Causes of Death by Age Group — Alaska, Ages 1–17 (2019–2023).
4. Alaska Department of Health. Alaska Violent Death Reporting System (AK-VDRS): Domestic Violence–Related Homicides.

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