

February 2, 2026

Senator Scott Kawasaki

Subject: In support of SB 196

Dear Senator Kawasaki,

My name is Barbara Mongar and I live in Palmer, Alaska. I am the Coordinator of the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition. I am writing in support of SB 196.

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition and its partners provide hands-on support for Alaskans leaving incarceration and successfully returning to their communities. We help them get employment, housing, and access to treatment and healthcare.

Many of the individuals we work with have mental and substance abuse issues and would benefit from having access to Crisis Now-related services.

Alaska's Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery Grants have been significantly cut since 2019. Alaska not only has the 2nd highest rate of adult suicide, it also has seen opioid- related deaths significantly increase in recent years.

SB 196 seeks to provide sustainable and predictable funding for Crisis Now-related services across Alaska by establishing a behavioral health crisis Service surcharge and establishing the behavioral health crisis fund. At \$.98 per line, SB 196 is estimated to generate \$6-8 million annually. The 988/Crisis Now framework seeks to alleviate the burden on law enforcement, first responders, hospitals, and corrections.

I support SB 196 because funding flexibility is built in to allow communities to expand capacity and Crisis Now related services based on specific local needs and gaps. Behavioral health crisis related services help individuals experiencing a crisis get stabilized and become contributing members of their communities.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Mongar
5945 E. Bideford Blvd,
Palmer, Alaska 99645



February 2, 2026

Alaska State Capitol
State Senate Labor & Commerce Committee
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Via electronic submission to Senate.Labor.And.Commerce@akleg.gov

RE: SUPPORT FOR SB 196—Behavioral Health Crisis Surcharge & Fund

Dear Chair Bjorkman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Inseparable, a national nonprofit mental health advocacy organization, I write in strong support of SB 196, legislation that would establish a sustainable funding source for Alaska’s behavioral health crisis system. By generating an estimated \$6-8 million annually, SB 196 would help ensure that lifesaving crisis services are available when Alaskans need them most--regardless of where they live or their ability to pay.

Mental health crises are a daily reality across the country. Every minute in the United States, an average of two people attempt suicide, three people with a mental health condition are booked into jail, and eight calls, texts, and chats are made to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. In Alaska, these challenges are even more severe. The state has the second-highest rate of adult suicide in the nation, the highest rate of teen suicide, and rising overdose deaths even as rates decline elsewhere. Too often, people experiencing a mental health crisis do not know where to turn--or they encounter systems that are overwhelmed, unavailable, or not designed to meet their needs.

SB 196 would help Alaska continue building a modern, effective crisis response system grounded in the nationally recognized “Crisis Now” model: someone to talk to, someone to respond, and a safe place for help. This evidence-based framework functions as a funnel, ensuring that people receive the right level of care at the right time. Most individuals in crisis can be stabilized through a call, text, or chat with the 988 Lifeline or Careline. A smaller share require a mobile crisis response, and fewer still need short-term stabilization in a dedicated facility. States and communities that have implemented this model have seen reductions in unnecessary emergency department visits, avoidable arrests, system costs, and--most importantly--preventable loss of life.

Alaska has made meaningful progress toward this vision, but continued reliance on limited general funds threatens the stability and growth of these services. SB 196 offers a pragmatic and proven solution. The proposed \$0.98 per-line surcharge would create a dedicated, ongoing funding stream to support crisis services statewide. Alaska would join at least eleven states, including Washington and Oregon, that have enacted similar 988 surcharges to strengthen their crisis response systems.

Critically, SB 196 prioritizes local flexibility. Through Division of Behavioral Health grants, communities would be able to invest in the crisis services that best meet their unique needs — whether mobile crisis teams, peer respite programs, crisis stabilization facilities, expanded 988 and Careline capacity, or culturally responsive services such as crisis and help lines tailored to Alaska Native communities.

We respectfully urge the Committee to advance SB 196 and help ensure that every Alaskan experiencing a mental health crisis has access to timely, compassionate, and effective care. This legislation represents an important step toward a crisis system that promotes safety, dignity, and recovery.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Angela Kimball".

Angela Kimball
Chief Advocacy Officer
Inseparable