



Alaska Native Health Board

THE VOICE OF ALASKA TRIBAL HEALTH SINCE 1968

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February 11, 2026

The Honorable Scott Kawasaki
Senator, District P
Alaska State Capitol Room 119
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: ANHB Support for SB 196: Behavioral Health Crisis Surcharge & Fund

Dear Senator Kawasaki:

On behalf of the Alaska Native Health Board (ANHB)¹, I write in support of Senate Bill (SB) 196, an Act to establish a behavioral health crisis services surcharge and the behavioral health crisis services fund.

This legislation is a critical step toward addressing the urgent behavioral health needs of Alaskans, which have been chronically underfunded for decades. State funding for behavioral health in Alaska is more important than ever before to meet the needs of escalating mental health and substance use treatment for patients and providers statewide. Alaska is facing a dire fiscal situation while federal dollars for critical behavioral health and substance use disorder programs are being eliminated, and the future of these federal programs is uncertain. Alaska's Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery Grants have been significantly reduced since 2019, at a time when investment in these services is most critical. Alaska now reports the second-highest adult suicide rate and the highest rate of teen suicide in the U.S. Alaska also saw opioid-related deaths significantly increase while other parts of the U.S. saw a decline. Failing to fund these services for even one more session has real life consequences for Alaskans.

The effort to stand up Crisis Now in Alaska began with the intent to improve the behavioral health system of care so that people experiencing a behavioral health crisis can get the right care in the right setting when they need it. The lack of timely and localized crisis support can lead to avoidable incarceration, hospitalization, or tragic outcomes. SB 196 provides a smart, targeted approach to developing and expanding a behavioral health crisis system that meets people where they are—before a crisis becomes a catastrophe.

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.

ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

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ISLANDS ASSOCIATION

ARCTIC SLOPE
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

BRISTOL BAY AREA
HEALTH CORPORATION

CHICKALOON VILLAGE
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

CHUGACHMIUT

COPPER RIVER
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

COUNCIL OF ATHABASCAN
TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS

EASTERN ALEUTIAN TRIBES

KARLUK IRA
TRIBAL COUNCIL

KENAITZE INDIAN TRIBE

KETCHIKAN
INDIAN COMMUNITY

KODIAK AREA
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

MANIILAQ ASSOCIATION

METLAKATLA INDIAN
COMMUNITY

MT. SANFORD
TRIBAL CONSORTIUM

NATIVE VILLAGE
OF EKLUTNA

NATIVE VILLAGE OF EYAK

NATIVE VILLAGE
OF TYONEK

NINILCHIK
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

NORTON SOUND
HEALTH CORPORATION

SELDOVIA VILLAGE TRIBE

SOUTHCENTRAL
FOUNDATION

SOUTHEAST ALASKA REGIONAL
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

TANANA CHIEFS CONFERENCE

YAKUTAT TLINGIT TRIBE

YUKON-KUSKOKWIM
HEALTH CORPORATION

VALDEZ NATIVE TRIBE

SB 196 would create a sustainable and predictable fund source for Crisis Now related services across Alaska. At \$0.98 per line, SB 196 is projected to generate \$6-8 million annually. In addition to providing funding directly to Crisis Now services, the expansion of those services would reduce the pressure on law enforcement, first responders, hospitals, and corrections. These funds will support mobile crisis teams, the Careline/988, 23-hour stabilization centers, workforce development, and increasing community driven culturally appropriate outreach, programs, and services, improving health outcomes statewide.

We applaud your leadership and dedication to advancing solutions that address the complex behavioral health needs of our state. ANHB supports SB 196 to fund chronically underfunded but critical services in Alaska.

Thank you for your continued advocacy for the health and well-being of all Alaskans. If you have any comments or questions regarding our recommendations in 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