

STATE OF ALASKA
DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
STATEWIDE SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL

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January 18, 2012

Representative Anna Fairclough
State Capitol Room 501
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Letter of Support for House Bill 21 (CSHB 21)

Dear Representative Fairclough,

On behalf of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, I express our full support for HB 21 expanding the membership of the Council to include representatives from the veteran and military community and a wider group of youth.

In 2010, the Council received public comment during its meetings requesting representation from the military and veteran service systems on the Council. These populations are a particularly high-risk group for suicide, with high incidence of post traumatic stress disorder, depression, substance abuse, and other disorders contributing to suicide.¹ In Alaska, the Veterans Health Administration is engaged with the suicide prevention system as a partner. The state suicide prevention plan, *Casting the Net Upstream*, includes a specific strategy to increase suicide prevention efforts related to active and veteran military service members. Thus, having a representative from the veteran/military systems will be of great benefit to the Council's work.

The Council currently has a seat reserved for a high school age youth. We have discovered that these members are often appointed as juniors or seniors, which limits the time they have to serve with the Council. HB 21 serves to expand the eligibility for the youth representative to age 24, so that this member can serve a full 4 year term. Also, this better reflect the actual age group with the highest risk of suicide in Alaska – youth age 15-24.²

The Council supports HB 21, and we thank you for your work on behalf of – and as a member of – the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council.

Sincerely,



J. Kate Burkhart
Executive Director

cc: William Martin, Chairman

¹ See *Losing the Battle: The Challenge of Military Suicide*, Center for a New American Security (October 2011).

² The age-adjusted rate of suicide for young men age 15-24 in Alaska between 2000-2009 was 56.1/100,000.