

Dear House Education Committee Members,

I am writing this letter in support of HB 102. My name is Caela Nielsen and I am the parent of a child who has received mental health treatment in both the long term and short term facilities at North Star. The stress created in a family and a child when they enter treatment is great and can often exacerbate the already pre-existing conditions requiring treatment. This is multiplied many times over when your child does not receive education that is equivalent to the education he would receive in his regular school setting. My child has fallen behind in his schooling and struggles to reintegrate into the public school system due to this. Can you imagine being a child who just received help for a serious mental health problem and then being told you are now one year behind in high school? This causes even more stress to the family when trying to convince the child to continue their education rather than drop out.

My family received the appropriate transition material for my child to return to the community, however the struggle was in getting the educational records needed for him to transition back into school. Many of the classes he took while in treatment did not align with classes being offered at his high school. The treatment facilities are in need of support in order to properly meet the educational goals of all children. My son has often times wanted to give up, but I have advocated for him and he will return to school however, it took a full week after we left North Star to transition back into the public education system, so he will now have even more educational material he has missed.

The current system for educating this population does not work. I believe by passing HB102 the education and school transitions for children receiving mental health treatment in Alaska will greatly improve. North Star has the ability to incorporate education with mental health, and when working through the treatment team process create a sound, supportive educational and transition plan for each child. Please support this population of children and pass this bill to support their educational undertakings.

Sincerely,

Caela Nielsen