



## 49th Rising

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February 27, 2019

Members of the House State Affairs and Judiciary Committees  
Alaska State Legislature

**Re: Comments in Support of HB 14**

Dear Committee Members,

Please accept this letter on behalf of 49<sup>th</sup> Rising in support of H.B. 14, which addresses assault in the first degree; relating to sex offenses; relating to the definition of 'dangerous instrument'; and providing for an aggravating factor at sentencing for strangulation that results in unconsciousness.

49<sup>th</sup> Rising is a non-partisan organization working to make Alaska as safe as it is beautiful. Alaska has the highest rate of reported sexual assault in the country. We have all heard this before. We have heard it so many times that this startling fact has lost its power. Yet, we just need to look at our friends, or sometimes in a mirror, to see the ocean of pain behind this reality. According to UAA's Justice Center, 1 in 3 Alaskan women has experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. Based on our firsthand experiences, we know that even those numbers are underestimates.

49<sup>th</sup> Rising endorses H.B. 14 as this bill will help address deficiencies in the current legislation, such as with regards to strangulation. Strangulation is often associated with sexual and domestic violence and is a form power and control which has a devastating physical and mental impact on victims. In fact, one study found that women who had been strangled by their partners were 7-times more likely to be victims of attempted homicide (Journal of Emergency Medicine, 2008). Strangulation blocks the flow of oxygen to the brain, and while victims may seem unharmed, they may have internal injuries and may die days or weeks later. Because of the psychological trauma resulting from strangulation, victims may also attempt suicide.

H.B. 14 also closes some loopholes in the current legislation with regards to non-consensual contact with ejaculate matter. As illustrated by the Schneider case, it is imperative for the safety of Alaskans that this loophole be closed. Non-consensual contact is traumatizing, even more so when it is unpunished by legislation.

Sincerely,

Barbara Johnson  
Founder - 49<sup>th</sup> Rising