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January 28, 2020

Representative Matt Claman
House of Representatives

Dear Representative Claman,

We were so pleased to learn about House Bill 181, the bill requiring public schools in Alaska to include mental health curriculum in eight grade health classes. Thank you for championing this important piece of legislation. We are honored to be named as one of the organizations to help develop the curriculum and look forward to that work!

As part of our work at the Power Center (formerly Alaska Youth Advocates) and Alaska Seeds of Change, we were selected to be part of a national learning collaborative to improve access to mental health care and reduce anxiety and depression for transition age youth, ages 13-23. One of the biggest goals of the project is to increase young people's awareness of their own mental health, what common mental health conditions are and how they might manifest themselves, and to reduce the stigma and increase knowledge about getting help for those conditions. What isn't known can be scary, and young people need to know that mental health treatment CAN help and that is possible to live full and satisfying lives, even with a chronic serious mental illness. This legislation goes a long way toward expanding that knowledge base in Alaska!

As an agency, we have previously worked with the Department of Education and Early Development on initiatives to promote trauma-informed schools, and we are eager to partner again for this work. Some of our staff are in the process of finalizing a "Mental Wellness 101" workshop that we will use internally, so they are primed and ready!

Thank you again for your leadership in introducing this legislation.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Myers
CEO

February 21, 2020

Representative Matt Claman
State Capitol Room 118
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: House Bill 181- An Act Relating to Mental Health Education

Dear Representative Claman,

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (Trust) supports HB 181 and we thank the students and professionals who are sharing their stories and advocating for positive change in Alaska's schools and communities.

The Trust has long supported advocacy and education to eliminate stigma related to mental illness and to improve lives through early intervention and prevention. Research shows that 50% of mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% begins by age 24. Alaskan students would benefit from high quality mental health education and related services in schools to help recognize early signs of mental illness and connect with supports sooner for improved health and education outcomes. This legislation is a positive first step towards a more supportive school environment for young Trust beneficiaries.

The call for mental health education for Alaskan students also highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach related to mental health supports in schools. The Trust also advocates for increased access to professional services in schools, including social workers and mental health counselors, as well as trauma-engaged consultation and professional development for staff.

We appreciate your leadership on this important issue and look forward to engaging with the legislature, administration, and community partners on improving mental health education and access to supports in schools.

Sincerely,



Michael K. Abbott,
Chief Executive Officer

Tom Chard
Chief Executive Officer
Alaska Behavioral Health Association (ABHA)
P.O. Box 32917 Juneau, Alaska 99803
907-321-5778
tom@alaskabha.org



02/22/20

Representative Matt Claman
State Capitol Room 118
Juneau AK, 99801
Representative.Matt.Claman@akleg.gov

Representative Claman –

Thank you for introducing House Bill 181. Testimony in support of the bill heard in House Education on February 17th and February 19th highlights the importance of the bill and the broad support for the legislation. The students that spoke in favor of the bill and the grave statistics from the CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), other school connectedness and climate surveys, and the data about lifelong impacts that we all struggle to turnaround were especially compelling. The bill is a very important step in reducing the stigma of mental illness that holds people back from seeking out the care they need.

We respectfully request that the Alaska Behavioral Health Association (ABHA), the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB), and the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC) be added as statewide resources and that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) be added as national resources.

The Alaska Behavioral Health Association (ABHA) is the statewide network of behavioral health treatment providers. ABHA’s members are providing behavioral health treatment from Prince of Wales to the Utqiagvik and from Eagle out to Adak. Our 70+ member organizations including tribal and non-tribal, for-profit and non-profit, secular and religious-based mental health and substance abuse treatment providers have come together to advance our common goal of access to quality, cost-effective treatment available to all Alaskans. Our providers are in the communities and often in the schools. We can offer both the technical expertise and the local understanding of the culture of the community to help achieve the intent of HB181.

The Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) is statutorily designated (A.S. §47.30.661) as the state planning and coordinating body for the purpose of federal and state laws relating to mental health services. The Board has several statutory responsibilities including: preparing and maintaining the comprehensive mental health plan, providing public forums for discussion of issues related to mental health services, advocating for the needs of individuals with mental disorders, and advising the legislature in matters affecting persons with mental disorders including about the development of necessary services and the effectiveness of programs. The Mental Health Board should be added because of their unique statutory role and responsibilities.

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC) is also established in statute (A.S. §44.29.300). The Council has the statutory responsibility to improve health and wellness throughout the state by reducing suicide and its effect on individuals, families, and communities; broaden the public's awareness of suicide and the risk factors related to suicide; develop healthy communities through comprehensive, collaborative, community-based, and faith-based approaches; and developing partnership between public and private entities that will advance suicide prevention efforts in the state. Beyond their statutory responsibilities, the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council can help implement the intent of HB181 with the experience they have gained working in partnership with the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to implement suicide prevention training in school districts across the state.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have research and evidenced-based resources and guidelines that can be used by educators in classrooms in furtherance of House Bill 181's intent. Additionally, the CDC developed and maintains the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). The survey has been the go-to source for data that helps us better understand some of the challenges students face. Alaska's YRBSS survey data is comparable to other states and to national averages. The surveys also provide good trend data including on topics such as persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, serious suicidal thoughts and suicidal attempts. Importantly, the survey results have been used to identify some of our biggest challenges and they have also been used to show the resilience and strength of our young people. Alaska's Department of Health & Social Services, Division of Public Health, Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion helps facilitate the YRBSS program in our state.

Finally, ABHA recommends adding the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to the list of national resources. SAMHSA is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. Congress established SAMHSA in 1992 to make substance use and mental disorder information, services, and research more accessible to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities. SAMHSA hosts nationwide Recovery Month activities every September to increase awareness and understanding of mental and substance use disorders and celebrate the people who recover. Students and schools could easily join in the activities as part of their health education efforts. SAMHSA also maintains a directory of evidenced-based practices including "Ready, Set, Go, Review: Screening for Behavioral Health Risk in Schools;" "After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools;" "Understanding A First Episode Of Psychosis Young Adult (Fact Sheets);" and "Supported Education Evidence-Based Practices (EBP)."

In addition to the more specific request to add the aforementioned resources to help support the bill, ABHA more generally recommends the following to help ensure success.

- Develop standards and support for educators to implement the intent of House Bill 181;
- Support school-based behavioral health services;
- Support community-based services that provide access to treatment;
- Incorporate all 8 Skills for a Healthy Life from Alaska Content Standards;¹
- Continue to support the Youth Risk Behavior Survey and other School Connectedness and Climate Surveys;

¹ Alaska Content Standards: Skills for a Healthy Life can be found online at: <https://education.alaska.gov/akstandards/Skills-for-Healthy-Life.pdf>. Accessed 21 Feb 2020.

- Continue to support the collaboration between the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC) and Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) that has provided resources for training and suicide prevention activities in school districts across the state.

Effectively engaging with these resources can implement House Bill 181 in a more cost-effective manner. Using existing resources and relying on state and local expertise can help avoid the unnecessary effort and cost of recreating the support needed to implement House Bill 181. Incorporating the more general recommendations will help ensure that this important legislation has the impact intended.

We are happy to help support this legislation in both its adoption and implementation. Thank you again for your leadership in addressing this issue.



Tom Chard

Alaska Behavioral Health Association

Cc: Bev Schoonover, Executive Director Alaska Mental Health Board and Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; Gina Agron, Department of Health & Social Services, Division of Public Health, Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) Coordinator.

From: [Emma Steinzeig](#)
To: [Rep. Matt Claman](#); [Rep. Harriet Drummond](#); [Rep. Grier Hopkins](#); [Rep. Andi Story](#)
Subject: HB 181
Date: Tuesday, February 25, 2020 3:46:59 PM

Hello,

My name is Emma Steinzeig and I am in my final semester of graduate school. I am in the MSW program at UAA. Through my two years in this program, I have had opportunities to meet with various clients, from all walks of life. At my current practicum placement, I meet with children and families. We see all sorts of behavior problems, to trouble sleeping, lying, school issues, ADHD, etc. We see as many as we can, but often times have to refer our clients out to see a different provider, such as a play therapist or a psychologist for a neuropsych.

I believe that HB 181, which is an act relating to mental health education, is vitally important. As a sponsor of this bill, you obviously understand the importance of educating children on all aspects of their health, which includes their mental health. I believe that the passing of this bill will help school age children for decades to come, and I would like to offer my support of this bill.

Thank you for all you do for the State of Alaska.

Emma Steinzeig



alaska children's trust

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alaskachildrenstrust.org

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3 February 2020

Representative Matt Claman
Alaska State Legislature
Capital Building, Rm 420
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB 181: An Act Relating to Mental Health Education

Dear Representative Matt Claman,

Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) extends its support for HB 181, "An Act relating to mental health education." Alaska Children's Trust works to prevent child abuse and neglect across the state.

House Bill 181 works to expand existing health education requirements by directing the Board of Education and Early Development to develop guidelines ensuring the inclusion of mental health education in grades Kindergarten through 12th grade. ACT supports HB 181 both for its capacity to increase identification of child abuse and neglect through greater discussion of mental health; and to promote resilience within our childhood population.

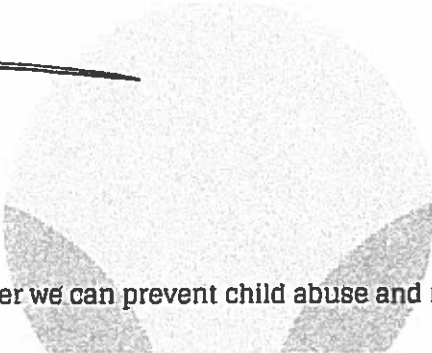
Alaska has one of the highest per capita rates of child abuse and neglect in the country. HB 181 works to increase awareness of the signs and symptoms of mental illness, which supports early identification and intervention in cases of child abuse and neglect. HB 181 also works to reduce stigma surrounding mental health by empowering youth to seek resources for support and treatment in cases of mental illness.

Alaska Children's Trust also supports HB 181 for working to promote resilience within Alaska's youth population. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study demonstrated the significant influence of childhood experiences in shaping lifetime health. Abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction both directly affect a child's mental health status in the short term and as they grow to become members of society. While recognizing that adversity is a natural part of life, ACT supports this bill's aim of providing youth with the tools necessary to address trauma through healthy coping skills.

House Bill 181 aligns with our core goals of fostering healthy development in children, promoting resilience, and strengthening families across Alaska. ACT applauds Representative Claman's willingness to openly address the importance of mental health in our childhood population. We look forward to continuing to work together to advance these shared goals.

Sincerely,

Trevor J. Storrs
President/CEO



Together we can prevent child abuse and neglect

From: [Jordan Posamentier](#)
To: [Rep. Matt Claman](#)
Subject: Letter of Support for HB181
Date: Thursday, February 06, 2020 8:47:23 AM
Attachments: [Outlook-5aknjcet.png](#)

Dear Representative Claman,

On behalf of [Committee for Children](#), I am writing to express our support for HB181. As a global nonprofit dedicated to helping children everywhere, including Alaska, thrive socially, emotionally, and academically, we applaud your efforts to include instruction standards on mental health into health guidelines and to encourage this type of instruction in public school systems.

If there is opportunity to work on this bill, **we would suggest including the insertion of *evidence-based instruction on SEL with mental health instruction***. Skills from all five SEL competencies, self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, social awareness, and healthy relationships, demonstrate an impact on promoting student well-being; thus, it would be beneficial to add SEL in instruction for students. As a case in point, Anchorage School District provides a shining [example](#) and leadership in SEL.

Perhaps of further interest to this legislation, Committee for Children recently published a resource that examines the connection between SEL and youth suicide prevention, which you can access [here](#).

Your educator workforce probably knows us by our flagship evidence-based SEL program, Second Step. But we do more than develop programs. As you advance this and related policy, we are here to serve as a resource, whether it be to connect you with our researchers, experts in the field, or SEL experts in your state, or to provide advocacy, policy support, or thought partnership.

Thank you for your work to further and improve students' learning experiences in Alaska.

Sincerely,

Jordan Posamentier

Jordan Posamentier | Director of Policy & Advocacy

206-673-6258

Twitter: @jposamen

jposamentier@cfchildren.org





January 31, 2020

Representative Matt Claman
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
State Capitol Room 118
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Claman,

Thank you for introducing House Bill 181.

At the NEA-Alaska Delegate Assembly on January 18th, 2020, NEA-Alaska members came together and voted to support passage of House Bill 181. It is clear to our membership that mental health curriculum is an important tool in supporting Alaska's students.

We appreciate and applaud your approach of seeking student input during the development of this legislation. In addition, our teachers and counselors appreciate the opportunity to offer input and support the development of effective and appropriate standards. Alaska educators are on the front lines of the student mental health crisis and have a lot to offer to this policy conversation.

It is an unfortunate and sad fact that our public schools lack the resources, counselors and mental health professionals necessary to systematically address the student mental health crisis in any serious or comprehensive manner. However, by raising awareness and beginning a conversation with students and educators about mental health issues we can reduce stigmas and build knowledge and awareness around mental health and mental health resources.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue. We look forward to supporting House Bill 181 as the legislative process unfolds.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Parker". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Tim Parker
President, NEA-Alaska



Anchorage School District

Education Center

5530 E. Northern Lights Blvd. • Anchorage, AK 99504 • 907-742-4000 • www.asdk12.org

February 27, 2020

Alaska House Education Committee
Alaska Capitol Building
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Members of the House Education Committee,

As superintendent of Alaska's largest school district, I am writing today to offer support for House Bill 181 Public Schools: Mental Health Education.

We recognize the many mental health issues students face daily. Helping our youth to recognize what encompasses mental health and providing access to appropriate resources is critical to ensure their overall well-being, health, and safety.

House Bill 181 seeks to expand the existing health curriculum statute to include mental health curriculum in all K-12 health classrooms. It aims to ensure students are adequately educated on vital information about mental health symptoms, resources, and treatment.

We applaud and support the tenets of HB 181 to include mental health curriculum within K-12 health education. This education is another step to breaking down the stigma and barriers that surround mental health. Helping students to understand that mental illness is common and treatable will empower them to know not only that they are not alone, but that they can still be successful in their life goals. We are very supportive of the efforts included in HB 181 to improve the well-being of Alaskan students.

Additionally, given the intricacies of implementing curriculum in K-12 schools, the Anchorage School District suggests that school districts be participants in the planning process when the curriculum is developed at the state level. This would ensure the implementation of very important and sensitive topics included in mental health education are implemented with the utmost care and effectiveness within schools.

In closing, I want to reiterate our support for HB 181. Approval of this bill will improve awareness of mental health for the students of Alaska.

Respectfully,


Deena M. Bishop, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Educating All Students for Success in Life

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Superintendent Dr. Deena Bishop

Good evening-

I support HB 181 and the addition of mental health curriculum to K-12 Health classrooms. We in Alaska have our fair share of mental health struggles and by talking to kids early about both their physical and mental health, we are normalizing getting assistance and will proactively help students understand and be able to support their own positive mental health.

At the same time, I leery of schools being the panacea for all social ills. I would strongly support partnering with mental health agencies and providing adequate funding for health services so that people are able to access mental health services when needed.

HB 181 is a good start towards this.

Thank you for your time,
Sara Dykstra
Anchorage, AK

Greetings!

I am requesting that you amend the existing health education curriculum statute to include mental health curriculum in all K-12 health classrooms. Any persons mental health is a natural part of who we are as people, not separate of our cognitive functions and therefore needs guidance for learning about how to foster it just the same. I was very impressed with one of the high school programs I learned about on the Line One radio program that had as guests two teenaged high school students. They were part of a team that serves as peer support to other students who may have mental health concerns which seems to have a positive impact and may even help in cases where students may be considering suicide. Teaching about mental health should be a natural part of any learning curriculum.

Thank you,
Connie Markis

Hello,

My name is Holly Miller I live in district 20 and I support HB 181. I support this bill because I live with the mental health condition of Bipolar disorder. I first began experiencing symptoms in my early teen years, shortly after entering High School. Unfortunately, I often look back and felt the school system failed me in helping educate and guide me. I was suicidal many times and often ended up in the councilor's office or being sent home for cutting. I felt the whole notion of it was very hush hush and I did not feel like I could truly talk to anyone about it, despite the school assemblies and guest speakers. This was simply not enough. I personally believe if mental health is added within the current health class curriculum, it could have opened up different and new opportunities for students to create groups or readily reach out for help more than the current options. I was hospitalized at 17 and had 2 more hospitalizations preceeding that one within the next 2 years. Education is knowledge and knowledge is power. Please support HB 181.

Thank you,
Holly Miller

Dear Alaska Legislators

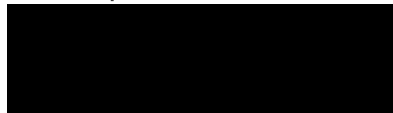
2/17/20

I support HB 181 K-12 Mental Health Education for Alaska's K-12 Students.

Passing this bill is an important step in increasing awareness, decreasing stigma and helping our youth and their families find support and understanding for mental illness.

Thank you for your consideration.
Sincerely

Laurie Tryck



Greetings,

I support HB 181

...and mental health means so much to me.

In high school I experienced many episodes of severe panic attacks. My initial thought was anything but a mental illness. did I have lime disease? bad circulation? diabetes? Am i experiencing a stroke? You see, my hands were tingling and numb right before I had a panic attack. that was my trigger. Something is wrong and it must be physical. I had no knowledge of mental illness and the symptoms except for what I saw on movies and tv, which never prints a favorable picture.

I want my daughter to know the signs of a mental illness and not to judge but to either get help for herself or a peer. I hope this bill will finally help with erasing the stigma placed on mental illness because mental health is health!

Thank you for your time.

Kate Yenik
Anchorage

Dear House Education Committee Members,

I have provided services for young people in Alaska for over a decade. During this time I have seen two teens I worked with directly take their lives. These young people may still be here today if they had sought help for their mental illness. Education is key to removing the stigma behind mental illness. By including mental health information in health classes, Alaska can make progress in addressing the staggering rate of suicide in this state. I support HB 181.

Thank you for considering my remarks.



Sincerely,
Karen Zeman



Dear Honorable Matt Claman,

Hello! My name is Lillian Yang and I am a 9th grader at West Anchorage High School. I am writing this with my club Amnesty International to push for mental health education to become mandated in school. Coming into high school, I have realized the importance of mental health awareness. With the pressures of college, social life, academics, and sports, I can see how many high schoolers can fall into a dark place over these years. Today, I ^{even} have friends who have suffered from depression and anxiety already - and I am worried about the situation. If those incredible people are at risk, what about everyone else? I additionally have a sister who has suffered from weight loss disorder for the past year, which has lead me to believe the need for increased mental health awareness.

In Alaska...

- 48% of females in grades 7-12, 2017 reported to have felt sad or helpless almost every day for 2 weeks in a row so that they stopped doing some usual activities - HHS.

I think a mandated mental health education in Alaska could really help lead to better/increased treatment and access in the state and help address mental illness overall. I really hope you can sponsor the bill, HB 181, to help make this an addition to our education system. Thank you so much for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,
Lillian Yang

Dear ALASKA State Legislature,

My name is Naomi Taylor. I am an 18 year old West High~~er~~ student and future voter. I believe that mental health advocacy is very important and is crucial to the wellbeing of youths in today's America. Though things are getting better, there is still a long way to go before the stigma of mental health is eradicated. Especially in Alaska, where the winter darkness makes seasonal depression much more popular, integrating mental health education and desensitizing the youth to the stigma behind mental health will make a huge step in the ~~the~~ progression of ~~mental health~~ normalizing and helping mental health in youths

Thank you,
Naomi Taylor

Dear Representative,

I would like you to know how beneficial the HB 181 Bill would be for our Alaskan youth. As a high schooler myself I would just like to express that I myself would have found meaning in learning about mental health. I think inherently for me, being apart of a black family, I have always had this stigma about mental health. I think there are times when minority children are often influenced to develop a mentality of 'push, push, push, go, go, go, survive, achieve, succeed' that ~~when there are times~~ we develop an extremely unhealthy mentality. Even in moments of weakness when I personally could have needed or used help — I didn't ask for it. I got this idea that I had to do everything for myself, solve every personal problem I had myself because no one was going to do it for me. However that is a lie. Mental health is NOT a weakness and more importantly it's is not something to be ignored. As an 8th grader we begin a long trek of difficulties and growth as we grow into ourselves. Children need guidance — ~~and~~ and you have the opportunity to change the course of childrens lives.

Thank you,

Asya Gipson.

Dear Alaskan state legislature,

Mental health advocacy is extremely important. As a senior in high school, it is something that I, along with many of my peers and friends, consider to be integral to our development as youth, and also struggle with at times. Hearing several people speak on this pertinent issue tonight at the MHATS event really brought to my attention just how important it is. Introducing and enacting House Bill 292 would be a great step towards advocating for and ensuring the development of this aspect of students that often goes un-addressed. Introducing a class about the importance and details of mental health to young students would help them deal with this sometimes sensitive subject, and make it a topic that is more widely recognized and easily discussed.

Sincerely,

a student ☺

Dear Alaska State Legislature,

Hi, My name is Sophie Mayer. I am a Sophomore at West Anchorage High School. Mental Health is such a large part of everyday life and it is essential for young children to be exposed to information about this stuff at a young age. Many kids start feeling things ~~at~~ at a young age but because of the lack of the fact that not much is shared about mental health, it is hard ~~to~~ for them to speak up for themselves. Did you know that 1 in 6 students seriously consider suicide? Bringing mental health education to middle schools can help kids to learn about all the options they have and that they are not alone. If this bill is passed ~~it will be one step closer to~~ it will be one step closer to a better world!

Thanks for your time,
Sophie Mayer

Dear Alaska State Legislature,

My name is Ian Beuls. I am a senior at West High School. This is my first time attending MHAIS tonight. We are only 3 states in and I already feel more whole as a person and it has most definitely affected me. I know for a fact that education such as this would have an enormous impact on our state as a whole. It will affect our today and future for the better.

Thank you,
Ian Beuls

Hello!

Thank you for taking the time to read our thoughts on why we think advocating for mental health is essential for our youth. As a high schooler who has had experience of depression in the past — I know that having the ~~my~~ wrong mindset while going through the experience has significantly drove me in the wrong direction. Having the right education and support in our schools will prepare our youth for the potential struggles that may rise as they grow up. When I was young, no one had ever told me about mental illnesses, signs of having them, as well as methods to cope. The only solution that I had thought of as a 13 year old was isolation, ~~my~~ sadness, and suicide. Teaching our youth ^{how} to react when we ever come ~~to the~~ ^{to that} point in our lives of giving up is an important life skill that must be brought to popular attention.

Passing this bill will not only teach our next generation on how to cope, but will also lead to a more happier, safer society for our community.

Dear Harriett Drummund,

I am a student at West High School, and I am writing to you about the importance of mental health advocacy in middle schools. It is important to teach about mental health in middle schools, because a middle school can be really hard for kids, and it is important to teach them that a lot of what they're feeling can be explained, and they can get support.

From,
Anra Kopkin

Please support HB 181

Dear Harriet Drummond,

My name is Ivy Marshall and I am a freshman at West Anchorage High School. Mental Health Advocacy is very important to me, because personally I struggle with mental health issues and I think it's something everyone should know about and be aware of.

According to a 2017 Alaska High School Youth Risk Survey, over 1 in 5 students seriously ~~attempt~~ considered attempting suicide, which is a crazy big number, too big.

The symptoms, risks and everything surrounding mental illnesses need to be talked about, and the stigma needs to be abolished.

P.S. thank you for introducing me and my sister a few years ago in the senate to be a page :-)

Sincerely,
Ivy Marshall

Dear AK State Legislature,

My name is Lorenna. I'm a senior at Service High School and cosponsoring HB 181 in health education will be crucial in improving the mental wellness of our youth. Every day, I see kids suffering from issues like depression, social anxiety, and mental abuse in their relationships and daily lives. Whether they're gifted, going through adversity, or seemingly happy, there are so many students going through internal struggles that affect ~~the~~ various facets of their health. As a student, I wholeheartedly believe that educating youth on how to recognize and combat these issues will enrich the culture of our overall community.

Sincerely,

A student

Dear AK State Legislature,

I am a senior at West Anchorage High School and am writing in support of HR 181. Middle school students are uniquely receptive to mental health education and are at a point in their lives where such education would be uniquely beneficial. To not support such an effort would be remarkably ignorant.

I am writing to support HR 181. Too often, mental health issues are not addressed and I believe that educating youth on mental health and giving them the information to know how to get support is vital. ~~Offering~~ offering mental health education in schools will help destigmatize mental health issues. Thank you.

Melissa Acosta

Dear AK Governance,

I am a student in the Anchorage School District who experienced the 8th grade health class. I also believed that they severely lacked mental health ed. and as we all know, middle school and beyond is hard & mentally challenging. I'm in support of this bill!

Thank you!

Piper

Dear Alaska,

I think it is very important to implement this bill because mental health issues need to be normalized. I watch my peers at school struggle everyday with mental health & it really hurts my heart. This is something that needs to be addressed.

Thank you,
Maya Kemp

Dear Alaska State Legislature,

My Name is Devon James, I am a junior at West Anchorage High School. I am writing to you for your support for HB 181.

In 2017, 36.1% of Alaska High School students reported to the Alaska High School Youth Risk ^{Behavior} Survey that they had experienced a depressive episode. 22.8% of those students considered suicide seriously. I regret to inform you that I was one of those students.

I ~~have~~ regret in that I even thought of ending my life. If I had an awareness of mental health in my community I believe my life would have turned out for the better. I am in a constant struggle to feel content. I hope you consider and approve HB 181 for the betterment of your state and its future. There is honestly no excuse in my eyes not to do it. Money should never be an issue over youth mental health. One in every five teenagers have a diagnosable mental condition. Those are your kids, grandkids, nieces, nephews, neighbors. And you can save them. Please, please, please support HB 181!

Sincerely, Devon James

Dear Alaskan leaders

I strongly support House Bill No. 181.
Sometimes the importance of our mental health is outshined by the importance of our physical health. In a state with one of the worst epidemics of mental health issues, we have to bring mental health education into the light where it belongs. Teaching the importance of mental health in schools is the first step in what will be a long road to making every Alaskan citizen a healthier, happier person.

Hopefully,

Julia

Dear Representative

As someone who's lived in AK >50 years I feel very strongly that mental health education is needed in Alaska. I practiced Neurology during those 50 years and often noticed depressed people who were unable to get help for crippling depressions. Often, the depression was linked to epilepsy, Multiple Sclerosis or other illnesses. In American society, too much shame and ignorance about sadness exists and people have no idea how to find help or even consider finding help. House Bill 181 is greatly needed.

Shirley H. Kiser MD
1000 I St # 204, 99501

Dear Representative,

My name is Aleya and I am a freshman at West High School in Anchorage. I am writing this to strongly urge you to add mental health to our health curriculum. It is incredibly important for students to learn about mental health throughout school so that they can understand the things that they and their friends are feeling in order to be able to address them and handle them, especially through the stress of high school. Being able to handle these issues when students are young results in happier adults who know how to handle their mental health issues as they arise. I personally dealt with anxiety and panic attack disorders in fourth grade, and had I not had an understanding teacher and supportive parents and been able to understand what I was feeling, I would not have been able to take the necessary steps (having a plan with my teacher to leave the classroom when I had panic attacks and later becoming homeschooled) to become stable and would have only deteriorated and would not be in the good place I am in today. I hope you will consider adding mental health education to health classes to help create a healthier, happier, well educated generation of students.

Sincerely,

Aleya

Aleya Brown

Amnesty International

~~Dear~~ Dear Alaska Legislature, my name is Isaiah Cruz and I'm a student. I think mental health is important because it just needs to be addressed everywhere and to everyone. It's now getting recognized because people are now speaking about their experiences. I love that MHATS is an actual thing where people can speak openly.

From my experience, I've struggled for a very long time because certain problems plus school. It was mostly overwhelming for everything I encountered. I couldn't ~~balance~~ balance a lot and problems just got worse. I just want an outlet for other kids so they never feel the same feeling.

Please support K-12 mental health education in Alaska. Please support HB 181.

Dear Alaska Legislature,

My name is Cassidy Austin and I am a 12th grade student from McCarthy / Anchorage, Alaska. I am writing in support of HB 181 because I believe that mental health education in ALL grades is crucial for a healthy and beneficial educational experience. Mental health is just as important as physical health and I hope that the future youth of Alaska have opportunities to learn about mental health and its importance.

-Cassidy

1/25/20

Dear Representative Claman,

Thank you so much for your advocacy for early education about mental health. This topic is new to my heart, as a parent of a 7th grader, and as a person diagnosed with Bipolar I and from a long line of family living with mental illness.

Middle school is already hard enough with hormones, new school works, social structures, pressure and opportunity. ~~Youth~~

I see firsthand the pressure teen boys have to fit in, and constantly compare their lives with those of their peers.

I also see how my son struggles with how normal/abnormal it is to have a mom who is occasionally hospitalized for a medical condition that is inexplicably "all in her head."

Education is key to normalizing and providing community and safety to those who need extra support. It teaches youth that it isn't something they need to tough through, and gives them permission and vocabulary to open up. It gives them tools to ~~learn~~^{recognize} warning signs in themselves and their peers. It destigmatizes something their grandparents saw as unnumable. It saves lives.

Thank you so much for seeing the value in education and role as an advocate for youth in Alaska.

Sincerely and with gratitude,

Aurora Hablett

Andy Josephson ☺

Dear Alaska State Legislature,

1/25/2020

Hello! My name is Stephanie O'Connor. I myself have been in recovery from Bipolar I disorder. I believe, education about Mental

since I was a teenager,

Health in school would have been very beneficial to me. It is also my belief that mental Health education would be/can be helpful to Alaska's students. Therefore, please support K-12 mental health education in Alaska. Please support HB 181. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Stephanie O'Connor

Dear Alaska State Legislature

I am a native American student and activist. Mental health support in schools is vital and the first step to normalizing mental health in schools. We need to know how to take care of ourselves and also how to ask for ~~mental~~ help when we are struggling. ~~We deserve~~ We deserve to be supported and taught about our bodies

With hopes of a better
future

Selah Judge

Dear Alaska State Legislature,
I am a student at West
High School and am writing to you
as an advocate for mental health
education for students through K-12.
As a teenager myself I grapple with
anxiety, the struggles of a body-mind,
social acceptance, stress from loneliness,
friends, family and work. There are
times everyday that I question who I am,
where I am going in life in general.
Statistics show that 36.1% of students
experience a depressive episode and
honestly I see the affects of this
everywhere. Especially here where detours
and cold keep us indoors alone, mental
health is extremely important. We need
to learn to love ourselves before we
can even begin to love the world
around us. ~~the~~ future

- Beatrix

Dear People who decide my education,
please help Alaskan students ~~to~~
learn to be happy and healthily sad

with love, Abby.

Dear Alaska State Legislature,

I am a student at West Highschool and I think that mental health, unfortunately, a big aspect in many ~~people's~~ adolescents lives.

Because of this I think that it is really important it is normalized. To do this it should be discussed in school, which would be possible if the Bill 181 is passed.

Thank you for your concern,

Tatum Hartlieb

Dear Rep. Kelly Merriok,

Hello, my name is Ana Smith, and I am currently a student at West High School in Anchorage. I am aware that a bill for mental health education has been introduced and as a student I completely support this bill and hope you will as well.

Numerous mental health issues are filled throughout the student life, the most common being anxiety and depression. I wouldn't be able to count the number of friends I've known that have or have had struggles with their mental health

The feeling of wanting to help someone but with no idea how to is a devastating feeling. With the mental health bill, it would benefit everybody, and allow my friends and other people with mental health struggles to seek guidance.

I urge you to sponsor or support this bill. I advise you to think of all the students that struggle with the mental health issue. Think of what is truly better for our future.

Sincerely,
Ana Smith

Dear Mr. Drummond,

My name is Lauren and I'm a freshman at West High. I'm a member of Amnesty International, and I want to ask you to support House Bill 181. I'm writing this because I think that mental health is a big issue today and we should educate more youth about it. My parents are therapists and they strongly believe that mental health isn't talked about enough. Teaching it in our schools will help create a brighter future. Please sponsor this bill, as it will help youth everywhere in Alaska.

Thanks,

Lauren

Im sad, this makes
me not sad, support it

-Carnap

Dear honorable Chris Tuck,

I am a freshman at West High School in the amnesty international. Please vote for the house bill 181 because mental health is important. I have had family members who have suffered so please do it. 19% of US adults experienced mental illnesses in 2018, please take action.

Sincerely,

Leo

Dear Alaska State Legislature,

My name is Fua Veselani and I am a student at West Anchorage High School.

I am writing to tell you why mental health is important to Alaska. Mental Health is important because when people go through it they feel as if no one is beside them, they feel as if they are all alone. Eventually, if they do not get help it will sadly end in a suicide. When teenagers reach out, they feel as if they are being judged, like an outcast. No one should ~~EVER~~ feel that way, we should have classes that ~~spread~~ spread awareness about mental health, we should inform people it's okay to reach out, it's okay to feel this sort of way.

Did you know that 36.1% of students reported experiencing a depressive episode? 22.5% considered attempting suicide. This has to stop we should lower the percentages.

Sincerely,

Fua Veselani.

Dear Representative Chris Tuck,

My name is True Spangler, and I am a member of the West High Amnesty International club. Amnesty International aims to campaign for human rights. Today I am writing this letter to urge you to vote in favor of the House Bill 181, which would require mental health education for K-12 students in the state of Alaska. Personally, there are many adults, and even children, in my life that suffer from mental health issues. I believe that all students would benefit from mental health education, whether it impacts them personally or the people around them. According to the organization Resources to Recover, nearly 4.2% of adults in Alaska are living with serious mental health disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression — 64.3% of these people receive no mental health treatment. Many Alaskan residents are unaware of the mental health assistance offered in their community, and some residents are uneducated about the importance of seeking help at all. If students were educated about mental health, they would be more likely to ask for help when they have symptoms of being mentally ill, and they will grow up knowing how to help others in mental health related crises. For these reasons, I urge you to vote in favor of House Bill 181.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter,
True Spangler

1000 W 70th Ave
Anchorage, AK 99518

Dear honorable representative Tuck,

I am a freshman at West Anchorage High School. I'm also involved in Amnesty International.

I think you should pass House Bill 181, as mental health is very important. Many big problems are caused by mental health, such as school shootings, and suicides. Teaching kids about mental health should be the first step to stopping these.

Sincerely,
Kian Flynn

Dear Rep. Kelly Merrick,

Hello my name is Mary Kim. I am currently a student at West High School. I've heard that a bill for mental health education has been introduced and as a student I entirely support this bill and hope you will as well.

Mental health issues are filled throughout the student life. I wouldn't be able to count the number of friends I've known that have or had struggles with their mental health.

The feeling of wanting to help someone but having no idea how to is a crushing feeling. The feeling of not being able to do anything to help your friends and family leaves you hopeless.

So please sponsor or support this bill. I urge you to think of all of the kids that struggle with this issue and think of what is truly better for our future.

Best Wishes,

Mary Kim

an urging student

Dear Honorable Chuck Kopp,

Hello, my name is Kim and I am a highschool freshman. I am writing this letter to advocate for HB 181. I have many friends who are and who have struggled with mental health such as depression, and it saddens me that some do not know the meanings of their feelings or know the resources to go to for help.

If mental health was taught at schools, a very large number of teens would be aware of signs to help themselves or others, as well as resources for help. Mental health accounts for 16% of diseases, and most people who have a mental illness don't even know it. Schools as well as the world will be a safer environment to those who need help.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter, and I hope you consider passing this bill. Alaska's teens will thank you!

Sincerely, Kim

Dear Honorable Matt Claman,

I am a freshman at West High School and I think the bill HB 181 would be very fundamental and necessary in our education. I am writing this because I believe mental health is very important and a mystery to most. In school we only touch the tip of mental health and don't really talk about how to prevent and treat this. Especially since mental health conditions account for 16% of the global burden of diseases and most people who suffer from mental health issues don't even know they have it. With this bill people will be aware of mental health and know the systems to prevent it. Please keep this in mind when discussing the bill. We truly need this bill in school.

Sincerely,
anonymous

Dear senator Kopp,

Hi! my name is Manisul and I'm a senior at West Anchorage High School. I am the publicist of Amnesty International. I don't know if you're familiar with Amnesty but West houses the only club charter in Alaska. We are very proud and we hope to keep being young members in the activism community. I am writing this today to beg you to please vote YES on the HB 101 Bill that begins on January 15th. For a long time, mental health is something that has been ignored or mistaken for other physical conditions. In other cultures it is largely dismissed and we are told to just "get over it". I think this bill would help so many young students & teenagers process their feelings during this tumultuous time. I think this would help create a safe environment for teenagers that might be struggling at home or in other areas of their life. Did you know that 1 in 4 teenagers experience some type of depression. This is actually a troubling number. Personally, I don't think I have been super depressed but the stress & anxiety that is caused by school and my job is definitely overwhelming. I think that if I could have had a trained professional to talk to or even learn about ways to destress I could have done better in tests and not experienced severe burnout last year. Please take into consideration the amount of youth that would be helped by this bill and please help make Alaska youth safer.

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely, Manisul

Y6

support mental health

!

- Emma Knapp. Carers Oxford

Olive Heatonole