



5 March 2021

Representative Matt Claman  
Alaska State Legislature  
Capital Building, Rm 118  
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB 60: An Act Relating to Mental Health Education

Dear Representative Matt Claman,

Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) extends its support for HB 60, "An Act relating to mental health education." Alaska Children's Trust works to prevent child abuse and neglect across the state.

House Bill 60 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 12<sup>th</sup> grade. ACT supports HB 60 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 60 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 60 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 60 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 60 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

Michael Hanley, *Chair*  
Susan Anderson, *Vice Chair*  
Suzanne Carte-Concroft -  
*Treasurer*  
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Ramona Reeves  
Marcus Wilson

March 12, 2021

Representative Matt Claman  
State Capitol Room 420  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

RE: Letter of Support for House Bill 60

Dear Representative Claman:

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) – Alaska Chapter enthusiastically endorses the passage of HB 60, “Public Schools: Mental Health Education.”

The burden of mental illness in Alaska continues to grow and the stigma associated with mental illness presents barriers to care and to services. Mental illness not only impacts individuals but is a public health issue that also affects families and communities. Despite the movement towards mental health awareness, many gaps still exist for those suffering with mental illness. The inclusion of mental health in the K-12 school curriculum will go a long way toward closing this gap. Education is an effective way of reducing the stigma and barriers that surround mental health. Educating our students on mental health will empower them to reach out for services earlier, which has been shown to improve outcomes.

Social workers are one of the largest providers of mental health services in the United States and both the NASW and NASW-AK are committed to spreading awareness and understanding of mental health needs. Therefore, the board of the National Association of Social Workers – Alaska Chapter strongly supports this bill.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this very important legislation.

Most Respectfully,



Nina Corbett, MSW, LCSW-NC  
National Association of Social Workers  
Alaska Chapter President



**Affiliates in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and North Slope  
Serving all of Alaska**

March 19, 2021

Representative Matt Claman  
Alaska State House of Representatives  
Alaska State Capitol  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: HB 60 - "An Act relating to mental health education."

Dear Representative Claman,

The board of NAMI Alaska is pleased to endorse HB 60, "An Act relating to mental health education."

This legislation amends the existing health education curriculum statute to provide mental health education as part of the overall K-12 health curriculum in order to adequately educate students on vital information pertaining to mental health symptoms, resources, and treatment. Strengthening the existing health curriculum in Alaska public schools by including mental health education and awareness will teach students to recognize the warning signs of mental distress and provide them with the language and resources to connect to help.

Half of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14 and early identification and intervention are essential to keep young lives on track. If mental health education were taught in schools as part of the overall health curriculum, a very large number of students would be aware of signs to help themselves or others, as well as opening up a dialogue relating to mental health concerns and discovering resources to get help.

By creating mental health education standards and encouraging schools to teach a mental health curriculum, HB 60 aims to decrease the stigma surrounding mental illnesses and increase students' knowledge of mental health, encouraging conversation around and understanding of this issue.

Thank you for sponsoring this important legislation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ann Ringstad", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ann Ringstad  
Executive Director  
NAMI Alaska

**NAMI Alaska** (National Alliance for Mental Illness) is the statewide umbrella organization for Alaska's four local and regional **NAMI** affiliates in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau and the North Slope. Our mission is to eliminate the stigma of mental illness. We provide education, support, advocacy, and public awareness so that all individuals affected by mental illness can build better lives. As per our Public Policy Platform, NAMI Alaska supports efforts by policymakers, and behavioral health stakeholders in working toward a coordinated and integrated system of care that supports prevention, intervention and wellness for the entire family.

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