



# Anchorage School District

## Education Center

5530 E. Northern Lights Blvd. • Anchorage, AK 99504 • 907-742-4000 • [www.asdk12.org](http://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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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 12<sup>th</sup> 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Trevor J. Storrs". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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-Saknket.org](#)

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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

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[jposamentier@cfchildren.org](mailto:jposamentier@cfchildren.org)





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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](mailto:tom@alaskabha.org)

**Alaska  
Behavioral  
Health  
Association**

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02/22/20

**Representative Matt Claman**  
State Capitol Room 118  
Juneau AK, 99801  
[Representative.Matt.Claman@akleg.gov](mailto: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 17<sup>th</sup> and February 19<sup>th</sup> 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;<sup>1</sup>
- Continue to support the Youth Risk Behavior Survey and other School Connectedness and Climate Surveys;

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<sup>1</sup> 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.





# ALASKA PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Committed To Advancing Alaska's Public Health Since 1978

## ALPHA

March 10, 2020

The Honorable Neal Foster  
House Finance Committee  
State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Foster and Members of the Committee

The Alaska Public Health Association supports HB 181 which encourages public schools in Alaska to provide mental health education for students in grades K-12 and provides for the development of State guidelines for instruction.

ALPHA has a long history of promoting school health education that is “comprehensive”. Comprehensive school health education curriculum addresses multiple critical topic areas K-12, including **mental and emotional health**, alcohol and other drugs, tobacco prevention, safety, violence prevention, healthy eating/nutrition, physical activity, sexual health, and personal health and wellness.

ALPHA advocates for the development and adoption of updated State standards for health education in Alaska that are grade-level specific, aligned with the [National Health Education Standards](#) and informed by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). In addition, ALPHA recognizes the need for curriculum training and technical assistance for health education teachers.

The Alaska Public Health Association (ALPHA) is a statewide organization of public health professionals and others dedicated to improving the health of all Alaskans, and is affiliated with the American Public Health Association. We believe that quality school health education can lead to improved health and educational outcomes for students.

Sincerely,

Jayne Andreen  
Policy Committee Co-Chair

cc: Representative Claman



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 18<sup>th</sup>, 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, appearing to read "Tim Parker".

Tim Parker  
President, NEA-Alaska