

ALASKA BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



formerly Anchorage Community Mental Health Services

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March 4, 2021

Representative Matt Claman
House of Representatives

Dear Representative Claman,

Thank you for your on-going support for mental health education in Alaska schools. We are appreciative of your continued efforts to champion legislation adding mental health to health curriculum guidelines (now House Bill 60 and SB 80) in this year's session.

Mental health education has never been more crucial. Over the last year, we have seen an increase in mental health issues as the isolation of the pandemic has taken its toll. As more students return to classrooms, we know they are bringing these concerns with them. Understanding what is happening with mental health is one of the first steps to improving it: self awareness is the beginning of the journey.

There has been a lot of concern and focus on youth mental health particularly. But we also know that mental health issues are not new, and they will not go away when life returns to "normal". HB 60 and SB 80 will help set guidelines for curriculum that will help Alaska students for years to come.

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.

Thank you again for your leadership in championing this legislation.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Myers
CEO

Psychiatric Services
Adult Services
Little Tykes
4020 Folker St
Anchorage

Child & Family Services
Parenting with Love and
Limits
4045 Lake Otis Pkwy
Anchorage

Rise Vocational Program
Residential Team
Transitions Team
1432 Ingra St
Anchorage

Alaska Seeds of Change
POWER Center
Transition Age Youth
704 W 26th Ave
Anchorage

Fairbanks
Adult Services
Psychiatric Services
1423 Peger Rd
Fairbanks

Fairbanks
Child & Family
Services
926 Aspen St
Fairbanks



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

March 8, 2021

The Honorable Matt Claman
Alaska House of Representatives
State Capitol Room 118
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support HB 60 – Student Mental Health Education

Dear Representative Claman:

The Alaska Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) supports the adoption of HB 60, which will include mental health in the overall health and personal safety curriculum for K-12 students and require that curriculum standards for mental health instruction be developed in consultation with the Department of Health and Social Services and representatives of national and state mental health organizations.

In 2019, we lost 32 young people ages 10-19 to suicide in Alaska, making it the 1st leading cause of death for that age group. According to the latest Youth Risk Behavior Survey (CDC, 2019), in the year before the survey, over 1 in 3 (38.1%) Alaska high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row; 25.4% seriously considered attempting suicide; 21.6% reported making a plan about how they would attempt suicide; and 19.7% attempted suicide one or more times. Youth suicide can be prevented through early detection of students who may be in crisis or struggling with their mental health and connecting those students and their families to resources and treatment services. We can and must do more to increase awareness of the mental health resources that are available for students who may be struggling.

Mental health is central to student success and well-being. Including age-appropriate mental health content in the overall school health curriculum for grades K-12 will help to reduce the stigma around mental health conditions and empower students to reach out for help should they notice signs of deteriorating mental health or suicide risk in themselves or their peers. Normalizing discussions on mental health and seeking help can increase the likelihood that students will connect with trusted adults and access available resources when needed.

With your support, we can act to affirm the state's commitment to improving the lives of Alaska's youth and prevent the tragic loss of life to suicide in the future. The AFSP Alaska Chapter appreciates your leadership and we look forward to working with you and your staff on these issues moving forward. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Jim Biela

Board Member, Lead Field Advocate - Alaska Chapter
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
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