

**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

February 8, 2022

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 allow school districts to provide mental health education as part of a 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, Alaska Chapter
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
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ALASKA BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



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RESOLUTION OF ANCHORAGE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, INC. *D/B/A Alaska Behavioral Health*

Whereas, national surveys show an alarming increase in mental health symptoms among young people over the last ten years, causing the US Surgeon General to issue an Advisory on Youth Mental Health¹, and

Whereas Alaska's traditionally high rates of suicide² appear to be increasing³, and

Whereas the last two years of COVID-19 pandemic have disrupted routines and increased social isolation, having a negative effect on overall mental health⁴, and

Whereas stigma and misinformation about mental health prevent families from seeking treatment, and

Whereas there are currently no statewide guidelines or curriculum for mental health education in Alaska's public schools, and

Whereas mental health is an essential component of overall health and should be included in Alaska's eighth grade health curriculum, and

Whereas including mental health education in existing health curriculum will increase awareness, teach students to recognize the warning signs and provide them with the language and resources to ask for help,

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Board of Directors of Alaska Behavioral Health strongly encourages the Alaska legislature to pass House Bill 60/SB 80: An Act Relating to Mental Health Education.

PASSED AND APPROVED AT A MEETING HELD ON THE 27th DAY OF JANUARY 2022

Irene J. Gobeli

Irene J. Gobeli (Feb 7, 2022 06:34 AKST)

Irene Gobeli, Board President

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted on January 27, 2021 by the Board of Directors of Alaska Behavioral Health by a unanimous vote of the 12-member Board.

Traci V. Gatewood

Traci Gatewood, Board Secretary

¹ <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

² <https://dhss.alaska.gov/amhb/Documents/data/Suicide%20Rates-Alaska-Western%20States%20and%20US%202007-2013.pdf>

³ <https://dhss.alaska.gov/commissioner/Documents/MentalHealth/scorecard/AlaskaScorecard2020.pdf>

⁴ <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/striking-impact-covid-19-pandemic-adolescent-mental-health/story?id=81752276>

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









HB60-SB80 Board Resolution - Passed during the meeting of 01.27.22

Final Audit Report

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