

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS

Fairview • South Addition • Forest Park • Downtown • North Star

Sponsor Statement: HB 167

Each year, hundreds of Alaskan children with behavioral problems are unnecessarily institutionalized in for-profit, locked psychiatric care facilities outside of Alaska. Children sent to out of state facilities are separated from their homes, culture, and families. Too often, children languish in these facilities for 6 months or longer. In 2022, the Department of Justice released a report on the state of Alaska's behavioral health system for children and found this practice to be in violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Between 2004-2014, the Department of Health and Social Services and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority partnered to establish the Bring The Kids Home Initiative to address chronic out of state institutionalization of Alaskan children. The combined allocation of state general funds and funds from the Trust were used to develop and support community-based services to better serve Alaskan children within the state. This program was successful, and placements for children in and out of the state dropped from 965 in FY 2004 to 605 in FY 2010.

Since the program ended in 2014, the numbers of children institutionalized out of state has resurged. Habitual institutionalization of children is ineffective and expensive. In 2018, Alaska spent \$18 million on placing children in Outside, for-profit psychiatric care facilities. Instead of subsidizing corporate, for-profit institutions, the state has a moral imperative to treat children in their state, in their communities, and near their families. This bill would prohibit the state from placing children in Outside, for-profit care facilities. Instead of such abusive placements, the state has an obligation to provide safe and supportive care here in Alaska, which is both more humane and more economical.