

Alaska Chapter

Incorporated in Alaska

American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®

Re: SB 231— Minors & Resident Psych Treatment Centers

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Dear Senator Claman,

The American Academy of Pediatrics, Alaska Chapter supports the passage of SB 231, Minors & Resident Psych Treatment Centers. After reading the Department of Justice Report titled Investigation of the State of Alaska’s Behavioral Health System for Children, we understand the need to take action to protect vulnerable youth in mental health facilities.

The passage of SB 231 will provide protection for Alaska’s children and teens by mandating improved monitoring and supervision of facilities providing in-patient mental health care. These increased inspections would help ensure that children in their care are consistently receiving guideline-based care and treatment. Patients would also have the opportunity to speak to inspectors about their care which aligns with the current national model of patient centered care.

When children and teens are hospitalized for mental health treatment, it is often a time of great anxiety for parents and guardians who are often not kept tightly in the loop about their child’s day to day treatment. SB 231 would mandate that parents/guardians are aware of the use of physical and chemical restraints used by mental health facilities. This is important as parents/guardians need to understand their child’s treatment as well as have the opportunity to discuss these actions with their child’s care team. Often parents are unaware of these occurrences which can lead to further harm when children replays this to parents after in-patient care has concluded. Parents/guardians need to be able to understand their child hospitalization experience. In addition, it is imperative to remember that AAP clinical report, [Evaluation and Management of Children and Adolescents With Acute Mental Health or Behavioral Problems. Part I: Common Clinical Challenges of Patients With Mental Health and/or Behavioral Emergencies](#) advises that “Medical professional organizations, including the AAP,¹⁸² the ACEP,¹⁸³ the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry,¹¹⁵ and the American Medical Association,¹⁸⁴ all have policies supporting these regulations, the principles of the humane and least restrictive possible use of restraint, and the need for further research in this area. The use of restraints remains controversial. Although restraints can be a component of patient treatment in certain situations,^{61,182,185} the use of restraints and seclusion has been questioned by some. According to the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, “Seclusion and restraint should be considered a security measure, not a form of ‘medical treatment’ that should only be used as ‘last resort measure.”

SB 231 would also expand patient access to allow for private communication between children and parents when appropriate. This can be vital in Alaska as many children are receiving in-patient mental health care quite far from home. In these cases, parents/guardians cannot easily visit their child leaving children feeling further isolated and disconnected during care.

Mental health conditions may be a lifelong issue for individuals and treatment needs to be a safe and productive time for them. Providing safe in-patient facilities and patient and family centered care is vital.

Sincerely,

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