

Senator Matt Claman and Representative Maxime Dibert
120 4th St, Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for S.B. 231 (Claman) and H.B. 366 (Dibert)

Dear Senator Claman and Representative Dibert,

My name is Donald Charlie and I previously served as First Chief of the Nenana Native Council. I am writing to urge you to enact Senate Bill 231 and House Bill 366. This legislation would improve transparency and parental oversight for Alaskan children who are institutionalized due to behavioral health challenges.

The Nenana Native Council strives to preserve the cultural heritage of our tribe, promote traditional values and beliefs, and help our young people thrive. The Council operates a local health clinic in Nenana, and the Tanana Chiefs Conference provides outpatient behavioral health services in our region.

But when a young person requires intensive behavioral healthcare, families must travel over 300 road miles to Anchorage in order to be treated at one of Alaska's two psychiatric hospitals. I personally know families who have made the difficult decision to seek help for their child but worried about the impact of this separation. These families want greater transparency in how psychiatric hospitals operate and how their children are treated. Understandably, they want more opportunities to monitor their child's health and progress.

I've heard for years about troubling treatment inside these facilities. Too many families have facing threats and intimidation when seeking information about treatment. Clients have evened been threatened with jail time.

This legislation would allow for increased communication between parents and children, ensuring that young people remain connected to their history, tradition, and identity. It would also increase oversight concerning how facilities use seclusion and restraint and whether they abide by important state laws. This is a critical step forward for Alaska Native families in my region, and I urge you to support the bill.

Though this reform will benefit all Alaskan families whose children require intensive treatment, it is especially important for Native families. One of every three institutionalized children is Native Alaskan. This modern family separation compounds the trauma of Alaska's historic family separation practices.

I appreciate your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Donald Charlie
Former First Chief of Nenana Native Council