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March 13, 2024

RE: Comments on SB 234, Extend Marijuana Control Board

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

The joint mission of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA) and the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) is to advocate for programs and services that promote healthy, independent, productive Alaskans. AMHB/ABADA are statutorily charged with advising, planning, and coordinating behavioral health services and programs funded by the State of Alaska. The Boards offer the following comments on SB 234, Extend Marijuana Control Board.

Regulating the marijuana industry is vital for upholding public safety, promoting responsible consumption, and safeguarding overall community well-being. While extending the State Marijuana Control Board is a positive step, it is crucial to consider a broader perspective and ensure that initiatives and task forces related to marijuana policies include designated seats for public health experts, professionals, and community representatives.

The Boards propose an amendment to SB 234 that introduces a dedicated seat for a provider of mental health or substance use services on the Marijuana Control Board. This inclusion would ensure that the voice of professionals with expertise in mental health or substance use services is heard in the decision-making process. The current board composition adequately represents the business and law enforcement stakeholders in the marijuana industry, but the perspectives of providers and impacted parents are only afforded a hearing through public comments.

Prioritizing public health within the Marijuana Control Board allows for a comprehensive approach to marijuana regulation, considering potential health implications at every stage. Public health experts bring valuable insights into responsible marketing, product safety, and the impact of marijuana use on vulnerable populations. Their inclusion is crucial for developing evidence-based regulations that prioritize the well-being of our citizens.

The Boards strongly urge you not only to support SB 234 for the extension of the State Marijuana Control Board but also to advocate for provisions mandating the inclusion of public health seats in all initiatives and task forces associated with marijuana-related policies. This inclusive approach will lead to more informed decision-making, ensuring that broader health considerations are thoroughly addressed.

Sincerely,

James Savage, Chair  
Alaska Mental Health Board

Renee Schofield, Chair  
Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse