

March 20, 2023

Alaska State Legislature  
Alaska State Capitol  
120 4<sup>th</sup> Street  
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support Senate Bill 24 – Youth Mental Health Education (ver. A)

Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

We, the undersigned organizations, extend our collective support for Senate Bill 24, "an act relating to mental health education." Allowing school districts the guidance and opportunity to provide age-appropriate mental health education to Alaska's students will offer additional supports to parents, reduce stigma surrounding mental health, and promote resilience within our children and youth in their darkest moments.

Well before this global pandemic disrupted their lives, young Alaskans have been crying out for help. Alaska's adolescent suicide rate has long been among the highest in the country, with self-harm deaths among 12-19 year-olds tripling the national average during 2016-2018. In 2019, suicide was the leading cause of death for Alaskans aged 15-24, and 22% of high school students reported having planned a suicide attempt in the previous year. In just a decade, the rise in suicidal ideation among Alaska teens has been alarming, with planning rates up 100% for male students and 80% for female students (2009-2019). And in 2020, state health official reports show suicide attempts among 11-to-14-year-olds are on the rise.

While the full impact of the pandemic on young Alaskans is still revealing itself, we know the mental health challenges they face existed long before. Yet despite all this data, the loss of our young people around the state cannot be measured. We recognize parents are their children's first and most important teachers and know what is best for them. However, some families need additional support to help ensure their child has every protection in life, especially against things we cannot always see.

Mental health is an essential part of overall health, a fact only underscored by this pandemic. Allowing local communities the choice to provide a more complete health curriculum is one clear step we can take towards ensuring our youth seek support when they need it most.

Youth are raising their voices for help, and it is time we listen. We, the undersigned, urge the swift passage of Senate Bill 24 to better support our young people. Please do not wait another year; the cost is far too great.

Thank you for your consideration and service to our state.

Signed,



### Alaska Chapter

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