



April 26, 2024

Alaska State Legislature
Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for Senate Bill 24-Mental Health Curriculum

Dear Senator Gray-Jackson,

Alaska Children's Trust offers our strong support for Senate Bill 24, which would provide guidance to schools around mental health education. As the statewide lead organization focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect, we support policies that promote the health and well-being of Alaska's children and families. Senate Bill 24 does this by supporting schools who choose to include mental wellness as part of their health education curriculum.

Senate Bill 24 would allow local communities the choice and opportunity to offer a more complete health curriculum. The mental health pressures facing youth today are numerous, from challenges navigating social media to the lasting impacts of the pandemic. Mental health and wellness are essential components of overall health. Just as youth are taught how to maintain physical health and well-being, they should also have the opportunity to learn how to maintain mental health and well-being. Additionally, this legislation would give additional support for parents, reduce stigma around mental health, and provide children and youth developmentally appropriate knowledge and resources about mental health.

According to Kids Count data, in the last decade the proportion of students feeling sad or hopeless has increased 52%. The rise in suicidal ideation among Alaska's teens has been alarming, with rates up 100% for male students and 80% for female students. In 2019, suicide was the leading cause of death for Alaskans aged 15 to 24 and 22% of high school students reported having planned a suicide attempt in the previous year.

Senate Bill 24 would supply youth with greater opportunity to access the knowledge and resources they need to care for their overall health, including mental health. Supporting students in this generation is important for strengthening the parents of the next generation and generations to come. We encourage you sponsoring this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Trevor J. Storrs
President & CEO
Alaska Children's Trust