



February 24, 2025

House Education Committee members
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear House Education Committee members,

NAMI Alaska strongly supports HB 105 – 'Mental Health Education'. This is a crucial step in providing school districts across the state with the guidance they need to address mental health education for their students. NAMI Alaska is in full support of this legislation.

Mental and physical health are deeply interconnected. One in six youth in the U.S. aged 6-17 experiences a mental health disorder each year, with half of all mental health conditions beginning by age fourteen. Addressing mental health early can significantly improve long-term outcomes for our youth. HB 105 establishes a necessary framework for schools to develop culturally and developmentally appropriate mental health education guidelines for their districts.

Educators, counselors, and school staff are often the first to recognize when a student is struggling. Sometimes, it only takes one trusted adult to make all the difference in a young person's life. Early recognition, education, and intervention can prevent more severe challenges later in life. HB 105 ensures that the State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Education and Early Development and key stakeholders, establishes high-level guidelines while allowing districts the flexibility to tailor curricula to their local needs.

By implementing statewide mental health education guidelines, HB 105 will help reduce stigma surrounding mental illness, equip students with essential knowledge about their own mental health, and encourage open conversations about well-being. Creating an environment where students feel safe discussing their struggles will lead to earlier interventions and stronger support systems.

NAMI Alaska is committed to working alongside the Department of Education, the Alaska Department of Health, the Alaska Department of Family and Community Services, and regional tribal health organizations to develop these guidelines over the next two years. Our mission is to ensure that every student has access to age-appropriate mental health education, empowering them with the tools to recognize signs of mental distress and seek appropriate help.



February 25, 2025

Re: Support for HB 105 & SB 41, Mental Health Education

Dear Members of the House Education Committee:

On behalf of VOA Alaska I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 105, which seeks to integrate mental health education into Alaska's K-12 health curriculum. This legislation is a critical step in addressing the youth mental health crisis by equipping students with essential knowledge, skills, and resources to support their well-being.

As an organization dedicated to behavioral health services for Alaskan youth, we see firsthand the urgent need for increased mental health awareness and early intervention. Alaska has the second highest rate of youth suicide in the nation, with the sharpest increase occurring among children ages 11–14. At VOA Alaska, we are witnessing alarming increases in self-harm and suicidal ideation among the youth we serve. Our kids are struggling, and the need for proactive solutions has never been greater.

HB 105 is more than just mental health education—it is prevention. By incorporating developmentally appropriate instruction on mental health, this bill will:

- **Reduce stigma** and normalize conversations around mental well-being.
- **Encourage help-seeking behaviors**, ensuring students know how and where to access support.
- **Teach self-care, wellness, and coping strategies**, empowering students to navigate stress and emotions in healthy ways.
- **Foster peer support and awareness**, helping students recognize when their friends may need help and how to respond.
- **Save lives** by promoting early intervention and connection to resources before a crisis occurs.

HB 105 aligns with best practices in behavioral health and education, ensuring that mental health is addressed with the same level of importance as physical health in Alaska's schools. By developing clear guidelines in collaboration with mental health professionals, educators, tribal health organizations, and state agencies, this bill will help create a supportive learning environment where students can thrive both academically and emotionally.

We commend Representative Galvin and Senator Gray-Jackson for championing this important legislation and urge lawmakers to prioritize its passage. VOA Alaska stands ready to support these efforts and look forward to partnering with the Department of Education and Early Development to help ensure its successful implementation.



February 26, 2025

House Education Committee
Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for House Bill 105 - Public Schools: Mental Health Education

Dear House Education Committee,

Alaska Children's Trust offers our strong support for House Bill 105, 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. House Bill 105 does this by supporting schools who choose to include mental wellness as part of their health education curriculum.

House Bill 105 allows 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. This legislation would support 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 by 59%. Suicide was the leading cause of death for Alaskans aged 15 to 24 in 2019. And in 2023, 21% of high school students reported having planned a suicide attempt in the previous year.

House Bill 105 would supply youth with greater opportunity to access the knowledge and resources they need to care for their overall health, including their mental health. Supporting students in this generation is important for strengthening the parents of the next generation and generations to come. Thank you for considering this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

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

Alaska Children's Trust

alaskachildrenstrust.org • (907) 248-7676 • kidsfirst@alaskachildrenstrust.org



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

Alaska

February 27, 2025

Dear Members of the House of Education Committee

RE: SUPPORT House Bill 105 Public Schools: Mental Health Education

The Alaska Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) offers our strong support for House Bill 105, which would require public schools to develop guidelines around integrating mental health into existing health curriculum.

Suicide was the leading cause of death for Alaskans aged 10 to 24 in 2022. Alaska Natives and American Indians consistently have the highest suicide rates of any racial and ethnic group in the U.S.

As the lead statewide organization focused on suicide prevention, AFSP-Alaska supports policies that promote the health and well-being of Alaska's children and families. House Bill 105 does this by supporting schools to include mental wellness to offer a more complete health education curriculum. The mental health pressures facing youth today are numerous, from challenges navigating social media to the lasting impacts of the pandemic. Just as youth are taught how to maintain physical health and well-being, they should also learn how to maintain mental health and well-being. This legislation would support parents, reduce stigma around mental health, and provide children and youth developmentally appropriate knowledge and resources about mental health.

In 2023, 21% of Alaskan high school students reported having planned a suicide attempt in the previous year. Let's hope our students never again have to reach this devastating level of crisis. House Bill 105 would supply youth with greater access to the knowledge and resources they need to care for their overall health, including their mental health. Supporting students in this generation is important for strengthening the parents of the next generation and generations to come. Thank you for sponsoring this important piece of legislation and staying dedicated to saving lives.

Respectfully,

James Biela

Advocacy Ambassador AFSP – Alaska Chapter

Co-Chair National Public Policy AFSP

(907)-545-4675

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
2440 E. Tudor #191 | Anchorage, AK 99507
afsp.org/alaska | alaska@afsp.org
Tax ID 13-3393329