

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 17, 2020

8:06 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair  
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair  
Representative Grier Hopkins  
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky  
Representative DeLena Johnson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Chris Tuck  
[One vacant seat as of 1/25/2020]

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 181  
"An Act relating to mental health education."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 181

SHORT TITLE: PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) CLAMAN

01/21/20	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/20
01/21/20	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/21/20	(H)	EDC, FIN
02/17/20	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

Representative Matt Claman  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented HB 181.

NATALIE FRASER  
Mental Health Advocacy through Story Telling  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

ZAFARA STRAIN

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

PATTY OWEN

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

JASON LESSARD, Executive Director

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

LILY WERTS

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

ZOE KAPLAN

Mental Health Advocacy through Story Telling

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

EMMA KNAPP, Student

West Anchorage High School

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

JADE PHILLIPS

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

BURKE CROFT

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

LUCAS JOHNSON, Student

Bowden College

Brunswick, Maine

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

JAYNE ANDREEN

Alaska Public Health Association; Alaska Women's Lobby

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

TREVOR STORRS, President/CEO

Alaska Children's Trust  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

MAKAYLA GOODMAN, Student  
Thunder Mountain High School  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

ROA MIHANU, Student  
Juneau-Douglas High School  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

RAYANN UBIXAM, Student  
Highland Academy Charter School  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

OLIVIA BOLAN, Student  
Thunder Mountain High School  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 181.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:06:39 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. Representatives Drummond, Story, Hopkins, Zulkosky, and Johnson were present at the call to order.

#### **HB 181-PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION**

[8:07:42 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND** announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 181 "An Act relating to mental health education."

[8:08:13 AM](#)

**REPRESENTATIVE MATT CLAMAN**, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 181. He explained that the proposed bill would amend the existing Kindergarten through twelfth grade ("K-12") public health education statute to include mental health

guidelines, providing information pertaining to mental health symptoms, resources, and treatment. He explained that the current statute includes prevention and treatment of diseases but excludes mental health.

[8:09:53 AM](#)

NATALIE FRASER, Mental Health Advocacy through Story Telling, shared her personal experience of mental illness. She described early onset of symptoms and the difficulties she encountered in identifying diagnosis and treatment options for many of her school years, leading to an attempt on her own life. She described her survival and accomplishments following intervention by a teacher who provided a suicide prevention class at her school. She described her advocacy work as part of a peer group who provide one another with support through storytelling - Mental Health Advocacy through Storytelling (MHATS). Ms. Fraser suggested that the onset of mental illness occurs at age fourteen. She indicated that resources for diagnosis and treatment options need to become institutionalized curricula within schools. She urged support of HB 181.

[8:12:29 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked Ms. Fraser to expound on MHATS.

[8:12:43 AM](#)

MS. FRASER explained that MHATS was founded in 2019, following a ten-week training program on storytelling, advocacy, story development, and storytelling from positions of positive strength. She described MHATS as a forum where youth between sophomore and senior grade level in high school share their lived experience of mental illness in a five- to seven-minute storytelling format, performed at well-attended, organized events. She compared the MHATS program to programs such as "This American Life." She noted that MHATS participants also spend time doing advocacy work, such as attendance of this hearing, as well as research and advocacy through multimedia to raise mental health awareness.

[8:13:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether the Church of Love event last year was the first MHATS event.

MS. FRASER confirmed that the event at Church of Love was the first MHATS official event.

[8:14:16 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked whether MHATS is a class or an extracurricular group.

MS. FRASER explained that MHATS is an extracurricular group funded through the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in Anchorage and is run entirely by youth. She explained that MHATS was formed by a small group of youth who drafted a grant proposal and is not associated with the school district.

[8:14:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY complimented Ms. Fraser's testimony as valuable, powerful, and vulnerable.

[8:15:15 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY echoed Representative Zulkosky's compliments of the testimony and asked Ms. Fraser whether she had approached her own school board regarding concerns about its mental health curriculum.

MS. FRASER answered that while no direct advocacy with board members has taken place, it is a future goal of MHATS, and school board members have attended MHATS events, and the conversation between the groups has begun.

[8:16:26 AM](#)

ZAFARA STRAIN, Student, testified in support of HB 181 and complimented the efficacy of public health education for herself personally. She expressed her desire that mental health be included in public education. She related her personal experience with mental illness throughout middle school and high school, resulting in her withdrawal to part-time status at school. She suggested that mental health education may have given her awareness and resources to address her own problems before they worsened.

[8:18:58 AM](#)

PATTY OWEN offered her credentials in public health, public health education, and school health and safety. She commented

regarding consultations with state and national health organizations and cited the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Health Education Standards and the Mental and Emotional Health at Grade Level Expectations in print to guide development of policy. She recounted that during her prior service as president on the Alaska Health Education Consortium, it was the board's mission to compel the state to require comprehensive mental health education in a number of areas. She suggested that consideration should be given to determine whether the programs are recommended or required. She advised evaluation of the available resources in an already overburdened school system when contemplating effectiveness of implementation of the bill. Ms. Owen advocated that schools need more counselors who are qualified social workers. She advocated for school-based and school-linked mental health services and encouraged continued legislative support of suicide prevention grant programs through Department of Education and Early Development.

[8:22:04 AM](#)

JASON LESSARD, Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), explained his professional, personal, and family associations with mental illness. He offered statistics regarding the negative outcomes of untreated mental illness, as follows:

Second leading cause of death among ... individuals from 10-34 is suicide. Ninety percent of those folks had a diagnosable mental illness. Seventy percent of the juveniles in our justice system have a mental health condition - at least one mental health condition.

MR. LESSARD cited that one in five individuals has a mental health condition. He offered the following perspective: "Looking at Juneau-Douglas High School, 600 students - that's 120 students. In a classroom of 30, that's six students."

MR. LESSARD cited the statistic that 50 percent of mental illness onset occurs by the age of 14, which is at or before high school age. He stated that 75 percent of people suffering from mental illness will experience onset by the age of 24; therefore, mental illness primarily occurs in the teenage brain, and this topic is not addressed directly to the children. He pointed out that the amount of time that individuals spend between onset of symptoms and seeking treatment is eleven years.

He suggested that early intervention will provide for better prevention and treatment of mental illness.

MR. LESSARD noted that one of the barriers to seeking treatment for mental conditions is stigma - media, stereotypes, and tropes. He suggested that stereotypes are countered by education. He explained that youth often seek information outside of the classroom and often encounter misinformation. He explained that NAMI has an evidenced-based video suitable for sharing within the school environment that produces the outcome of students reporting a more positive outlook towards seeking treatment than before watching the video. He concluded that there are programs available now that are effective at reducing the deleterious effects of untreated mental illness.

[8:27:19 AM](#)

LILY WERTS shared her personal experience with bipolar disorder from the age of 5 to age 22. She stated her belief that if mental health had been part of her public education, then she and her family would have avoided years of struggle and pain. She urged support for HB 181 to provide youth with tools and resources to help them thrive and be successful.

[8:29:02 AM](#)

ZOE KAPLAN, Mental Health Advocacy through Story Telling, testified in support of HB 181 and shared her personal experience with mental health issues stemming from sixth grade. She explained that her mother is a trained social worker and was able to detect early onset symptoms and arrange for her care. This established a skillset for her to identify the onset of a depressive episode in the tenth grade and seek treatment. She noted that 36 percent of youth in Alaska suffer from one or more clinical depressive episodes.

[8:31:05 AM](#)

EMMA KNAPP, Student, West Anchorage High School, explained that, during a recent English class storytelling exercise, many students shared stories of struggles with their mental health. She noted many students expressed difficulty with identifying resources for mental health care. She suggested that HB 181 would provide early detection skills and treatment options currently lacking for students.

[8:33:13 AM](#)

JADE PHILLIPS shared her personal experience with mental health issues and reiterated previous testimony in support of HB 181. She added that 12 percent of youth in Alaska have attempted suicide and suggested that school age children are particularly vulnerable to remaining undiagnosed and isolated.

[8:35:10 AM](#)

BURKE CROFT testified in support of HB 181, and he suggested that all youth in Alaska should realize the benefits of public mental health education.

[8:40:44 AM](#)

LUCAS JOHNSON, Student, Bowden College, testified in support of HB 181. Mr. Johnson stated that he is working in multiple states to incorporate mental health education into public schools. He cited a 2017 Alaska High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey in which n= 1,343 among 40 schools. In the 12 months prior to the survey 36.1 percent of adolescents experienced a depressive episode, 22.8 percent seriously considered suicide, 20.7 percent made a plan to commit suicide, and 12 percent attempted suicide.

MR. JOHNSON cited the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Adolescent Health, which indicated that 15 percent of children aged 12-17 experienced at least one major depressive episode in the 12 months prior to the survey. The CDC National Center for Health Statistics reported that Alaska had the second highest suicide rate since 2005, and the 2017 suicide mortality rate was 27 suicides for every 100,000 residents.

MR. JOHNSON endorsed the passage of HB 181.

[8:43:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked whether Mr. Johnson has worked to implement social and emotional health in addition to behavioral health advocacy in other jurisdictions.

MR. JOHNSON answered by making a distinction between students' ability to learn about their own mental health and social emotional learning being teachers' training tools. He suggested that social emotional learning has widespread value but that he

has been focused on advocating the education of students [on mental health].

[8:44:55 AM](#)

JAYNE ANDREEN, Alaska Public Health Association; Alaska Women's Lobby, testified in support of HB 181. She recalled the statistics from the Youth Risk Behavior Study. She highlighted the statistic that of the students studied who have considered, planned, or attempted suicide, 46.8 percent of those students have talked to someone about suicide. She suggested that the passage of HB 181 would give all students access to mental health care. She suggested incorporation of all eight of the model standards included in the bill.

[8:47:27 AM](#)

TREVOR STORRS, President/CEO, Alaska Children's Trust, testified in support of HB 181. He acknowledged that based on the students' testimony to the committee, that students are asking for mental health in public education. He noted that two out of three Alaskan adults have an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) score of one or more. He suggested that education in public schools has high efficacy against deleterious effects from childhood trauma.

[8:49:30 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND opened public testimony on HB 181.

[8:49:55 AM](#)

MAKAYLA GOODMAN, Student, Thunder Mountain High School, shared her personal experience of her father's mental illness that led to his substance abuse and death. She suggested that mental health education in public schools would have been helpful for her to cope and avoid shame and stigma associated with the death of her father. She urged the passage of HB 181.

[8:51:01 AM](#)

ROA MIHANU, Student, Juneau-Douglas High School, shared his personal experience with his own mental illness, and suggested that the lack of mental health education in schools resulted in delays in his seeking and obtaining treatment.

[8:53:12 AM](#)

RAYANN UBIXAM, Student, Highland Academy Charter School, shared her personal experience in dealing with her own and her family's mental illnesses, which has spanned multiple generations. She suggested that mental health education in school would have been helpful in her seeking and obtaining treatment for mental illness. She urged the passage of HB 181.

[8:55:54 AM](#)

OLIVIA BOLAN, Student, Thunder Mountain High School, shared her personal experience of loss through suicide, and suggested that shame and stigma surrounding mental illness could be mitigated by mental health education in public schools. She suggested that abstinence-only training on substance abuse in public schools is ineffective and inadequate. She requested passage of HB 181.

[8:57:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that HB 181 would be held for further review.

[8:58:13 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 8:58 a.m.