

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

February 22, 2023

3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 29

"An Act relating to civics education, civics assessments, and secondary school graduation requirements; establishing the Alaska Civics Education Commission; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 24

"An Act relating to mental health education; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 29

SHORT TITLE: CIVICS EDUCATION; EST AK CVCS ED COMM

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

01/18/23	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/23
01/18/23	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/23	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/22/23	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 24

SHORT TITLE: PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) GRAY-JACKSON

01/18/23 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/23
01/18/23 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/23 (S) EDC, HSS, FIN
02/22/23 (S) EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

TIM LAMKIN, Staff
Senator Gary Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced SB 29 on behalf of the sponsor.

LISA BOUDREAU, State Policy Director
CivXNow
Cambridge, Massachusetts

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 29.

BILLEEN CARLSON, President-elect
Alaska Council for Social Studies
Nikolaevsk School
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 29.

ROBERT HADLEY, Social Studies Content Specialist
Lower Kuskokwim School District
Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 29.

BESSE ODOM, Staff
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the sectional analysis for SB 24.

ANN RINGSTAD, Executive Director
National Alliance on Mental Illness Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 24.

JASON LESSARD, Advisor
Mental Health Advocacy Through Storytelling (MHATS)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 24.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:08 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Kiehl, Gray-Jackson, Bjorkman, and Vice Chair Stevens.

SB 29-CIVICS EDUCATION; EST AK CVCS ED COMM

[3:32:48 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR STEVENS announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 29 "An Act relating to civics education, civics assessments, and secondary school graduation requirements; establishing the Alaska Civics Education Commission; and providing for an effective date."

[3:32:56 PM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, introduced SB 29 on behalf of the sponsor, Senator Stevens, as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 29 is intended to improve awareness of the importance of civics education in Alaska.

While most Americans agree on the importance of preparing young people for citizenship in a democracy, civics education has received diminishing attention in schools over the past couple of decades. There has been a gradual paradigm shift in preparing students first for college and jobs, responding to increasing accountability demands, and heavy emphasis on mathematics, reading, and writing. Experts believe a decline in civic engagement, such as the decline in voting rates among young voters since 18-year-olds were given the right to vote in 1972, may be a direct result of the decrease in emphasis placed on civics. Coupled with the present-day political climate we are observing, many are calling for a return to civility.

One response to this decline in civic engagement has been for states to develop content standards in civics or government, which occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s. This was an effort to ensure students have a basic understanding of the fundamentals of how our

government works, of the documents on which American democracy is based, and of basic democratic values. Notwithstanding state efforts to improve instruction in the core academic disciplines, states should also establish statewide assessments aligned with their civics standards.

While many individuals and organizations have sought to address the poor condition of civics education, the problem remains acute. Strong state policies are needed to establish and reinforce the fact that preparation for civic life is equally as important as preparation for higher education and careers. In fact, preparation for active citizenship was a foundational principle of public education in America from its beginning, and it is a principle that must be reaffirmed by each generation.

By passing SB 29, Alaska will join with other states in an effort to restore attention to the importance of civics education in our schools, and ultimately in steadying civic engagement within our country.

I appreciate your consideration of this legislation.

[3:35:35 PM](#)

MR. LAMKIN provided a section analysis of SB 29, work order 33-LS0246\A, as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Sec. 1: **AS 14.03.076**, relating to public schools, adds a new section
- a. directing the State Board of Education & Early Development (SBOE) to develop curriculum and a related assessment based on the civics portion of the naturalization examination administered by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for immigrants seeking U.S. citizenship. The curriculum and assessment must also include systems of Alaska Tribal government;
 - b. requiring students to complete a semester course taught using the curriculum, or to pass the assessment established in (a) above in order to receive a high school

- diploma, with exceptions for students with a disability and who receive a waiver from their local school board;
- c. schools are to document on student transcripts when a student has passed the assessment, with the option for the student to retake the assessment repeatedly;
 - d. districts are required to report annually on their respective civics course offerings and overall average student score on the assessment; and
 - e. a passing score is defined as correctly answering 70% or more on the civics assessment.

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Sec. 2: **AS 14.07.168**, relating to existing reporting requirements of the SBOE, to include in their annual report to the legislature:

- (5) a description of civics education curriculum in the state, of civics-related course offerings in respective districts, and of student performance on the assessment described in section 1, by district; and
- (6) the recommendations made by the Alaska Civics Education Commission established under AS 14.07.215 below.

Sec. 3: Applies to Sec. 22, **Chapter 40, SLA 2022**, wherein 14.07.168(4), relating to reporting a summary and utilization of the AK Virtual Education Consortium established in AS 14.30.800, the required reporting being repealed on June 30, 2034. This section is for legal drafting purposes only and has no bearing on SB 29 itself.

Sec. 4 **AS 14.07.200** is created, establishing the Alaska Civics Education Commission (ACEC) and staffed by the lieutenant governor.

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AS 14.07.205 describes the 12-member composition of Commission, including:

- 1. the lieutenant governor as the chair;
- 2. a justice of the AK supreme court;

3. the Commission of Education & Early Development;
4. two members of the AK State House of Representatives;
5. two members of the AK State Senate;
6. five members appointed by the governor as follows:
 - a. two civics or social studies teachers, one of which teaches via correspondence studies, and one is a member of the National Education Association;
 - b. one member representing a non-profit organization that has civics as a core mission;
 - c. one member representing the Association of Alaska School Boards;
 - d. one member who is a student in good standing.

AS 14.07.210 describes the terms of office for ACEC members as being for 2 years, with vacancies being filled in the same manner as the previous appointment

AS 14.07.215 describes the duties of the Commission to include a review of best practices, pedagogies and policies for civics education, and to make recommendations and provide guidance for the State Board of Education & Early Development in implementing civics education recommendations made by the Commission.

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AS 14.07.220 requires at least quarterly meetings of the Commission, which may be done electronically. AS 14.07.225 is routine reference to voluntary service, there being no compensation but travel expenses and per diem may be claimed for serving on Boards & Commissions.

AS 14.07.295 defines reference to the "Commission" as the Alaska Civics Education Commission.

Sec. 5: Acknowledges the effective date of the repealer (June 30, 2034) described in Section 3 of the bill.

Sec. 6: Provides an effective date for the remainder of the bill of July 1, 2023

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VICE CHAIR STEVENS announced invited testimony for SB 29.

[3:40:41 PM](#)

LISA BOUDREAU, State Policy Director, CivXNow, Cambridge, Massachusetts, provided invited testimony on SB 29 as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Before detailing our work at CivXNow and addressing the merits of Senate Bill 29, I want to speak to the perilous state of our constitutional democracy.

We've long lamented the state of civic knowledge in the country, and the annual Annenberg Public Policy Center's Civic Knowledge Survey released last September is cause for continued concern:

- Less than half (47%) of U.S. adults could name all three branches of government, down from 56% in 2021. One in 4 respondents could not name any.
- Asked to name the five rights protected by the First Amendment, fewer Americans could name any of the five than in 2021. For example, less than 1 in 4 people (24%) could name freedom of religion, down from 56% the prior year.

Turning to K-12, we're all too familiar with depressing scores from the nation's report card, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, where civics and U.S. history scores regularly rank lowest among all subjects tested. In 2018, only 24% of 8th graders were deemed proficient on a test measuring civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and a paltry 15% were proficient in US history.

These results taken together, it's fair to question the extent to which Americans are prepared

for informed, effective, and lifelong civic engagement. Solutions are not immediate or singular, but as social studies educators, we offer the most promising long-term plan for strengthening and sustaining our democratic institutions.

[3:42:58 PM](#)

MS. BOUDREAU continued:

Stated simply, civic education is key to rebuilding trust in institutions and one another, fostering informed patriotism and civility, and empowering citizens to build a more perfect union.

However, civics has been egregiously neglected over the past 50 years, coinciding with the troubling trends that I outline before

We estimate that the federal government invests in civics at less than fifty cents per K-12 student versus \$50 per student in STEM subjects.

This comes on the heels of two decades of retrenchment in social studies education since the advent of No Child Left Behind. The Council of Chief State School Officers estimates that 44% of school districts have cut back on instructional time for social studies over a 20-year period.

I'm here representing a coalition, CivXNow, that is 275 organizations strong and representative of the country's political and geographic diversity.

Our coalition facilitates:

- Aggregation of research and measurement to make the empirical case for high quality civic learning opportunities across the curriculum and throughout students' K-12 experience
- Narrative change to position civic learning as fundamental to our nation's democratic strength
- And policy and advocacy to push for adoption of state and federal policies that incentivize schools' civic mission.

CivXNow established a state policy task force with membership from 40 states (**Alaska is not among them**). We seek to support state coalitions, establish relationships with state policy makers, identify and activate behind policies to strengthen K-12 civic education, and ultimately, to ensure adequate resources for their implementation.

These nonpartisan policies are articulated in CivXNow's State Policy Menu. Among its key provisions are:

1. Universal, equitable access to high-quality civic learning experiences (stand-alone civics courses in middle and high school and designated instructional time in K-5)
2. Civics centered in state standards
3. Assessment and accountability (civic seals and K-12 civic learning plans)
4. Pre- and in-service teacher professional development
5. Schoolwide and community commitments to civic learning
6. Resourcing policy implementation

[3:45:25 PM](#)

MS. BOUDREAU continued:

We conducted a 50 state policy scan with these provisions in mind and found:

- 37 states and DC (**Alaska is not among them**), require a high school civics course, but only seven for a full year.
- Turning to middle school, the situation is bleaker with only seven states requiring a stand-alone civics course. Twenty-six states and DC, **not including Alaska**, do require civics instruction.
- Civics is officially assessed in 32 states, passage of the U.S. Naturalization Test the most frequent vehicle (**Alaska does not require a civics assessment**).
- Finally, 24 states and DC provide students with credit for completing service learning projects (**While Alaska doesn't provide credit for service learning, districts may do so**).

[3:46:16 PM](#)

MS. BOUDREAU continued:

Senate bill 29, sponsored by Senator Stevens, will create a permanent Alaska Commission on Civics Education, composed of leaders in our state government, teachers and students passionate about the issue, serving to periodically forward recommendations to our state Board of Education and Early Development. Commissions like these have been formed in other states such as Indiana and Georgia. The bill will also create required course time and a civics test for high school graduation.

The restoration and reinvigoration of civic education in Alaska will be a long, yet worthy process. Commitments from educators, administrators, policy makers, and other stakeholders will have to be made to uphold the desire to revamp civic education. I have an optimism about the state of civic education in Alaska in that the new Commission will develop a plan based on pedagogy and proven practices in civic education. It will be critical for the Commission to internalize all research on civic education and act upon its recommendations. It will also be critical for the Commission to support educators with resources, training, and clear guidance so that implementation is successful.

At a time when our civic health is badly bruised, and our political discourse seems more polarized than ever, the prospects for knitting together our fraying democracy may well rest on what happens in classrooms across this great state.

[3:47:39 PM](#)

MS. BOUDREAU continued:

Stronger state K-12 civic education policies will ensure that our students graduate with the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary self-governance. They'll emerge equipped to overcome dis- and misinformation, transcend toxic political polarization, rebuild trust in our democratic institutions and in one another, and thus strengthen and secure our constitutional democracy for us and our posterity.

[3:48:12 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR STEVENS said he appreciates the efforts of CiviXnow in bringing civics to the forefront of education.

[3:48:42 PM](#)

BILLEEN CARLSON, President-elect, Alaska Council for Social Studies, Nikolaevsk School, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, Soldotna, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 29 as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

I'm currently the only certified teacher at Nikolaevsk K-12 on the Kenai Peninsula.

I'm here today as the president-elect of the Alaska Council for the Social Studies. We are the state's foremost social studies organization for teaching professionals. We serve as Alaska's front line educators and administrators and the pedagogical experts who can help support the renewal of our collective commitment to ensure that Alaskans have the tools they need to keep our democracy and tribal governments strong. But we can't do it without policy change.

Sadly, Alaska is currently only one of two states in the nation that has no civics course requirements in middle school, nor in high school. There is also no assessment.

There was a time when schools were the guardians of democracy. Schools were the medium to pass along the information about why and how our democracy works. It was the place for learning how to think critically, and analyze information. Civic education helped us develop a sense of reflective patriotism and instill a deep appreciation for our country's history, founding documents, values, and institutions.

[3:50:05 PM](#)

MS. CARLSON continued:

Civics is missing in our schools. But it is important that we bring it back. Civics is the way students

learn and understand the complex and often confusing systems of government, and it teaches them how to effectively participate in the political process, whether that is as a future volunteer for a parent council, or as an elected representative. Civics teaches students the importance of voting, how to advocate for themselves and their communities, and how to engage in civil discourse. These skills and dispositions help our students become informed and responsible citizens who contribute to our workplaces, our tribes, our communities, and our country. Perhaps one day my students will step into leadership roles in their community, whether it's serving on a school board, or in the Alaska Senate, (as the members of this committee have).

SB 29, is a bill sponsored by the honorable Senator Stevens that would require a semester-long civics course in high school and a summative civics exam, as a requirement for high school graduation. Additionally, this bill would create the Alaska Civic Education Commission of dedicated individuals to carry forward a commitment to excellence in civics teaching and learning by serving to periodically forward recommendations to our state Board of Education and Early Development. This bill will help us renew the civic mission of schools.

In closing, we can only achieve civic excellence by passing down the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be informed, effective participants in civic life from generation to generation. This bill will establish the groundwork needed to move us in the right direction.

[3:51:53 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR STEVENS thanked Ms. Carlson for testifying, being a teacher in the Kenai school district, and bringing students to the Capitol.

[3:52:13 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL asked Ms. Carlson to define reflective patriotism in the context of her testimony.

[3:52:29 PM](#)

MS. CARLSON said reflective patriotism is students recognizing reasons to be proud of their country. Adolescents are generally

apathetic to patriotism. They do not feel they are a part of the system. She stated she tries to get them excited about the United States' system of government, its founding documents, and being part of a governmental process that has been amazing for 250 years. Reflective patriotism is a way for students to think about how they can be a part of local, state, and federal government.

[3:53:19 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR STEVENS asked Ms. Carlson how long she had taught at Nikolaevsk.

MS. CARLSON replied she has taught six years at Nikolaevsk and 10 years in the Kenai school district.

[3:53:46 PM](#)

ROBERT HADLEY, Social Studies Content Specialist, Lower Kuskokwim School District, Bethel, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 29 as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

This past year I worked to pioneer a new Civics pilot program focusing on the needs of civic engagement in our small remote communities in southwest Alaska. The pilot program was the product of efforts by classroom educators throughout the district who saw an unmet need in our curriculum for effective civics education. Our high schools only offered an optional half-credit in comparative government.

I serve an almost exclusive Native Alaskan population in over 20 small communities of between 300-800 in a school district that is the size of West Virginia. I do this largely through video teleconference tools like Zoom, which creates unique challenges in engagement. So many of our students don't feel well connected to their government at any level: Federal, State and even Tribal. Part of the goal of the class was to give them a sense of connectivity to their local government by participating in the Tribal Council and carrying out a civic project that was based on their passion or concern in their community. Many of my students selected and tackled difficult issues like alcohol abuse, domestic violence and acute housing shortages in their village and worked to advocate for potential policy solutions with local

leaders. Our class allowed them to practice democracy in real life.

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MR. HADLEY continued:

Our students stand on the shoulders of many who have advocated for their rights as indigenous Alaska Natives fighting for civil rights, land, and subsistence rights through ANCSA and ANILCA. But many of our students don't have the skills needed to continue advocating for their hard-won rights moving forward. Civics education isn't simply about good citizenship for our students, it's about their very survival. I work to find ways to incorporate this knowledge in my Tribal Government courses, but most students don't take these classes and are unaware of this past and the important role they play in their villages, a role that more robust civics education can help fill.

SB 29 is an important step in the right direction for the State to reinvigorate its commitment to civic learning and the civic mission of schools. This legislation will create new required course time and a civics test in order for our students to graduate from high school. This bill would also establish a Civic Education Commission, who with the legislature's support, will work to ensure that all Alaskan students learn the valuable skills needed to be fully engaged citizens, understanding both their rights and their responsibilities as members of their tribe, their state, and this country.

[3:56:28 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR STEVENS asked Mr. Hadley how long he had taught school.

[3:56:35 PM](#)

MR. HADLEY replied that he has taught for 29 years, with five of those years working for Lower Kuskokwim School District.

VICE CHAIR STEVENS said SB 29 has two fiscal notes that the committee would examine at another hearing.

[3:57:25 PM](#)

SENATOR KIEHL commented that the legislation allows for multiple ways to demonstrate knowledge of civics and the exam is not a high stakes test. He said the state requires three credits in the broad category of social studies for a student to graduate. He asked if the civics course would add an additional half credit to the graduation requirement or would it count towards the existing three credits.

[3:58:32 PM](#)

MR. LAMKIN said he spoke with all 55 school districts in Alaska about graduation requirements and made SB 29 non-prescriptive out of concern for local control. All but three school districts generalize social studies to include subjects such as US government, US history, Alaska Native studies, and economics. He acknowledged that while some schools require four credits in social studies to graduate, SB 29 is not seeking to increase credit requirements. Instead, civics instruction is assigned half of a credit from a district's existing requirement.

[3:59:42 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON referred to the sectional analysis for SB 29, page 2, paragraph 4, and asked for a definition of pedagogies.

[4:00:40 PM](#)

SENATOR BJORKMAN answered that pedagogy is the practice or art of teaching.

[4:01:09 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR STEVENS found no further questions or comments.

[4:01:16 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR STEVENS held SB 29 in committee.

[4:01:21 PM](#)

At ease.

SB 24-PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

[4:02:52 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR STEVENS reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 24 "An Act relating to mental health education; and providing for an effective date."

[4:03:02 PM](#)

SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON, District G, sponsor of SB 24, said the bill is the same as Senate Bill 80 that she sponsored last session. She introduced SB 24 as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 24 amends the existing health education curriculum statute to include mental health curriculum in all K-12 health classrooms to adequately educate students on vital information pertaining to mental health symptoms, resources, and treatment.

The Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development and the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) will develop guidelines for instruction in mental health in consultation with numerous stakeholders. Such organizations include, but are not limited to, the National Council for Behavioral Health, Providence Health and Services Alaska, Southcentral Foundation, Anchorage Community Mental Health Services, Inc., North Star Behavioral Health System, and the National Alliance on Mental Health Illness Alaska. The standards will be developed in consultation with counselors, educators, students, administrators, and other mental health organizations to form effective guidelines for school boards, teachers, and students.

After standards have been developed, the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development and DEED will be responsible for implementation throughout the Alaska school system. As with existing health education curriculum, the DEED, the Department of Health, and the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault will provide technical assistance to school districts in the development of personal safety curricula. An existing school health education specialist position will assist in coordinating the program statewide.

SB 24 aims to decrease the stigma surrounding mental illnesses and increase students' knowledge of mental health, encouraging conversation around and understanding of the issue.

[4:05:27 PM](#)

BESSE ODOM, Staff, Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 24 as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Section 1: The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to read Legislative Intent. This section specifies what entities will develop guidelines for instruction in mental health.

Section 2: This section amends AS 14.30.360(a) by removing the word "physical" when referencing instruction for health education and adding "mental health" and "physical health" to the list of curriculum items each district includes in their health education programs.

Section 3: This section amends AS 14.30.360(b) by clarifying that health guidelines developed by the Board of Education and Early Development must provide standards for instruction in mental health and be developed in consultation with the Department and other entities.

Section 4: The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to read Report to the Legislature. This section clarifies that a report must be given to the Senate Secretary and Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives. This report should include a copy of developmentally appropriate instruction and describe the process used to develop such guidelines.

Section 5: The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to read Transition. Specifically, the section requires that the state Board of Education and Early Development shall develop the mental health guidelines within two years after the effective day of this Act.

Section 6: This section sets an effective date of July 1, 2023

[4:07:29 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR STEVENS announced invited testimony for SB 24.

[4:07:55 PM](#)

ANN RINGSTAD, Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, provided a brief overview of the history and purpose of NAMI in Alaska. She said

SB 24 mends existing health education curriculum statutes to include mental curriculum in public K-12 schools. It adequately educates students on vital information about mental health symptoms, resources, and treatment. One in six youth aged 6 - 17 in the US will experience a mental health condition, and half of all mental health conditions begin by age 14. One in three adults aged 18 - 25 will experience a mental health challenge. Education, early intervention, and working on prevention are keys to minimizing common mental health issues and hopefully irradicating the long-term disabilities caused by mental illness. Mental health and physical health are coupled.

[4:09:41 PM](#)

MS. RINGSTAD said that SB 24 aims to decrease the stigma of mental illness by establishing and encouraging schools to follow guidelines that will increase students' knowledge of mental health by encouraging conversation and understanding. Decreasing stigma leads to early intervention and improved outcomes. NAMI appreciates the reports commissioned by numerous organizations addressing mental health support in schools throughout Alaska. All school districts in Alaska face barriers to delivering mental health supports, such as:

- Alignment
- Availability
- Access
- Resources
- External Influences

MS. RINGSTAD said districts use various internal and external approaches to address student mental health. However, the variability between them makes identifying overarching commonalities and themes difficult. Strengthening existing public school health guidelines in consultation with stakeholders and others listed in the legislation will guide school districts to educate students in recognizing warning signs of mental distress and provide them with the language and resources to locate help.

[4:12:16 PM](#)

JASON LESSARD, Advisor, Mental Health Advocacy Through Storytelling (MHATS), Anchorage, Alaska, said he has been an adult advisor for MHATS, a youth-developed and youth-led storytelling program, for five year. The program teaches kids to talk about their personal health journey. He also serves on the

Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) governing body as a patient advocate and chair of the ethics committee.

[4:13:15 PM](#)

MR. LESSARD said he would like to see SB 24 pass because there is a mental health crisis among. Fifty percent of all lifelong mental illnesses begin by age 14 and 75 percent by age 24. The onset of mental illness essentially happens in the teenage brain. Curricula must be changed to promote early intervention, so students understand mental illness and mental wellness, have the language to talk about it safely, and understand how and where to find resources for themselves and others. Nine out of ten calls to the mental health line are resolved and do not need further action. Getting information into the hands of youth is important because youth share information with each other. It is also essential that conversations happen in a healthy way. Some school districts have unwittingly sought the use of outdated mental health curriculums that have adverse effects. The goal of SB 24 is to establish guidelines to help school districts establish curriculums. SB 24 is not a mandate.

[4:17:32 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR STEVENS held SB 24 in committee.

[4:17:33 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Vice Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 4:17 p.m.