

SB

35

Alaska State Legislature

Senator Bettye Davis, Chair
Senator Joe Paskvan, Vice Chair
State Capitol, Room 30
Juneau, Alaska 99801
Phone: (907) 465-3822
Fax: (907) 465-3756



Committee Members:
Senator Johnny Ellis
Senator Joe Thomas
Senator Fred Dyson

Senate Health & Social Services Committee

February 18, 2009

To: Legislative Legal

465-2029

From: Lynda Zaugg, aide to Sen. Davis

Re: CS for SB 35

Sen. Davis is requesting a CS for SB 35 to make the attached proposed changes in Suicide Council Membership.

Attachment: Recommended changes to Statewide Suicide Council Membership

Recommended changes to Statewide Suicide Council Membership Compositions.
Recommendations made by the SSPC membership at their quarterly meeting, February 4, 2009
in Juneau, AK.

Proposed changes:

1. The four (4) legislative members appointed by the Legislature would become advisory in nature and would no longer be voting members. This would reduce the difficulty obtaining a quorum at meetings.
2. Change the "two members who are employed in the executive branch of state government" (a.) to add the language: one person representing the DHSS and one person representing the DEED.
3. Change "one person who is a counselor in a secondary school to "(e.) an employee from a secondary school system such as, but not limited to, a teacher, administrator, counselor, nurse or other school personnel.
4. Change "one adult who is active in a statewide youth organization" (f.) to one person who is active in a youth organization.
5. Change "one person who is under the age of 18" (j.) to one person who is enrolled in high school.
6. Add one public member at large.

Lynda Zaugg

From: Laughlin, Wilda J (HSS) [wilda.laughlin@alaska.gov]
Sent: Friday, February 13, 2009 4:04 PM
To: Lynda Zaugg; Casto, L Diane (HSS); Thomas Obermeyer; Sen. Johnny Ellis
Subject: SB 35 Suicide prevention council membership
Attachments: SSPC Recommended changes to Membership Compositions--02-09.doc

The Governor's office and Department of Health and Social Services support the attached recommendations for changes to membership of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council.

Please let me know if you need anything else on this.
w.

Name	SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL	
Senator Bunde		
Senator Davis	✓	BD
Senator Dyson		
Senator Ellis		JE
Senator Elton		
Senator French	✓	
Senator Hoffman	✓	
Senator Huggins		
Senator Kookesh		JK
Senator McGuire		MG
Senator Menard		MM
Senator Meyer	✓	
Senator Olson		OL
Senator Paskvan		PK
Senator Stedman		
Senator Stevens	✓	
Senator Therriault		
Senator Thomas		TH
Senator Wagoner		
Senator Wielechowski		WI

**SENATE COMMITTEE REPORT
First Committee of Referral**

DATE: 1/21/09

FURTHER: Finance

Date of 5-Day Notice: 1/22/09
(in accordance with Uniform Rule 23)

DATE TURNED
IN TO OFFICE: 2/25/09

Health and Social Services Committee considered SENATE BILL NO. 35

SB 35 EXTEND SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL

"An Act extending the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; and providing for an effective date."

and recommends:

- be replaced with SCS or CS SB 35 (HSS)
- adopt previous SCS or CS _____
- attached amendment(s)
- adopt _____ Letter of In _____
- further referral to _____ Committee

SENATE BILL:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Same Title
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	New Title
HOUSE BILL:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Same Title
<input type="checkbox"/>	Technical Title Change
<input type="checkbox"/>	New Title w/ SCR # _____

CS
Forth
coming

NEW FISCAL NOTE(S):

OTE(S):

Department	Date	Fiscal	Indet	Zero	FN#
DHS	1/23/09	✓			1
DHS	1/23/09	✓			2

Department	Date	Fiscal	Indet	Zero	FN#

APPROPRIATION - no fiscal note

SIGNATURES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:	PRINTED LAST NAME	DO PASS	DO NOT PASS	NO REC	AMEND
	ELLIS	✓			
	Thomas	✓			
	PASKVAN	X			
	Dyson	X			
CHAIR:	DAVIS	+			

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA
2009 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Fiscal Note Number: _____
Bill Version: SB035
() Publish Date: _____

Identifier (file name): SB035-DHSS-SPC-01-23-09 Dept. Affected: Health & Social Services
Title: Extend Suicide Prevention Council RDU: Behavioral Health
Sponsor: Davis Component: Suicide Prevention Council
Requester: Senate Health & Social Services Component Number: 2651

Expenditures/Revenues (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

	Appropriation Required	Information						
		FY 2010	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
OPERATING EXPENDITURES								
Personal Services								
Travel		35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0
Contractual		30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6
Supplies		17.2	17.2	17.2	17.2	17.2	17.2	17.2
Equipment								
Land & Structures								
Grants & Claims								
Miscellaneous								
TOTAL OPERATING	0.0	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8

CAPITAL EXPENDITURES								
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CHANGE IN REVENUES (
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FUND SOURCE (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts								
1003 GF Match								
1004 GF								
1005 GF/Program Receipts								
1037 GF/Mental Health		82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8
Other Interagency Receipts								
TOTAL	0.0	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8

Estimate of any current year (FY2009) cost: 0.0

POSITIONS

Full-time								
Part-time								
Temporary								

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

The proposed bill extends the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) to June 30, 2013. The SSPC will continue to be assigned to the Division of Behavioral Health (DBH). The costs to DBH would include expenses related to the council meetings, teleconferences, presentations and suicide prevention public awareness campaigns.

Prepared by: Melissa Stone Phone 269-3410
Division: Behavioral Health Date/Time 1/23/09 12:00 AM

Approved by: William H. Hogan, Commissioner Date 1/23/2009
Dept. of Health & Social Services

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA
2009 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Fiscal Note Number: _____
Bill Version: SB036
() Publish Date: _____

Identifier (file name): SB036-DHSS-BHA-01-23-09 Dept. Affected: Health & Social Services
Title Extend Suicide Prevention Council RDU Behavioral Health
Component Behavioral Health Administration
Sponsor Davis
Requester Senate Health & Social Services Component Number 2665

Expenditures/Revenues (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	Appropriation Required	Information					
	FY 2010	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Personal Services		46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3
Travel							
Contractual							
Supplies							
Equipment							
Land & Structures							
Grants & Claims							
Miscellaneous							
TOTAL OPERATING	0.0	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3

CAPITAL EXPENDITURES							
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CHANGE IN REVENUES (
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FUND SOURCE (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts							
1003 GF Match							
1004 GF							
1005 GF/Program Receipts							
1037 GF/Mental Health		46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3
Other Interagency Receipts							
TOTAL	0.0	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3

Estimate of any current year (FY2009) cost: 0.0

POSITIONS

Full-time		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Part-time							
Temporary							

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

The proposed bill extends the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) to June 30, 2013. The 0.5 FTE administrative support position, hired by the council, will continue to be assigned to the Division of Behavioral Health.

Prepared by: Melissa Stone
Division: Behavioral Health

Phone 269-3410
Date/Time 1/23/09 12:00 AM

Approved by: William H. Hogan, Commissioner
Dept. of Health & Social Services

Date 1/23/2009

LEGAL SERVICES

DIVISION OF LEGAL AND RESEARCH SERVICES
LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS AGENCY
STATE OF ALASKA

(907) 465-3867 or 465-2450
FAX (907) 465-2029
Mail Stop 3101

State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182
Deliveries to: 129 6th St., Rm. 329

MEMORANDUM

February 2, 2009

SUBJECT: Sectional summary of SB 35 (Work Order No. 26-LS0229\A)

TO: Senator Bettye Davis
Attn: Thomas Obermeyer

FROM: Alpheus Bullard *TAD*
Legislative Counsel

You have requested a sectional summary of the above-described bill.

As a preliminary matter, note that a sectional summary of a bill should not be considered an authoritative interpretation of the bill and the bill itself is the best statement of its contents. If you would like an interpretation of the bill as it may apply to a particular set of circumstances, please advise.

Section 1. Extends the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council to 2013.

Section 2. Provides an effective date.

TLAB:ljw
09-052.ljw

Audit Info should be mandated

26-LS0229A

SENATE BILL NO. 35

**IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA
TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION**

BY SENATORS DAVIS, Ellis, Therriault

**Introduced: 1/21/09
Referred: Health and Social Services, Finance**

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

1 **"An Act extending the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council;**
2 **and providing for an effective date."**

3 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

4 *** Section 1.** AS 44.66.010(a)(8) is amended to read:
5 (8) Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (AS 44.29.300) - June 30,
6 2013 [2009];
7 *** Sec. 2.** This Act takes effect immediately under AS 01.10.070(c).

Alaska State Legislature

Interim: (May - Dec.)
716 W. 4th Ave
Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone: (907) 269-0144
Fax: (907) 269-0148



Session: (Jan. - May)
State Capitol, Suite 30
Juneau, AK 99801-1182
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Fax: (907) 465-3756
Toll free: (800) 770-3822

[Senator Bettye Davis@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Senator_Bettye_Davis@legis.state.ak.us)
<http://www.akdemocrats.org>

Office of Senator Bettye Davis

April 10, 2009
Senator Charlie Huggins, Chair
Senate Rules Committee

RE: Request to calendar SB 35, "An Act extending the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; and providing for an effective date."

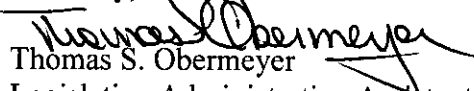
Dear Senator Huggins,

Senator Davis respectfully requests that Senate Rules promptly calendar SB 35 which extends the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council to **June 30, 2013**. The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Suicide sunsets June 30, 2009, so immediate action is required if the state is to help curtail this avoidable loss of life by suicide, particularly by so many young people each year. The mission of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council is to advise the governor and the legislature on issues relating to suicide. In collaboration with communities, faith-based organizations, and public-private entities, the Council works to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans by reducing suicide and its devastating effect on individuals, families, and communities. Over 125 Alaskans die each year by suicide, which is twice the national average per capita. Suicide is four times more prevalent among young males than females. Guns, alcohol, drugs, and unattended depression are often involved.

Attached in order are the following:

1. Sponsor Statement
2. The most recent version of the bill
3. Sectional analysis
4. Fiscal Notes
5. Additional Documentation

Sincerely,


Thomas S. Obermeyer
Legislative Administrative Assistant

Alaska State Legislature

Interim: (May - Dec.)
716 W. 4th Ave
Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone: (907) 269-0144
Fax: (907) 269-0148



Session: (Jan. - May)
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Juneau, AK 99801-1182
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Toll free: (800) 770-3822

[Senator Bettye Davis@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Senator_Bettye_Davis@legis.state.ak.us)
<http://www.akdemocrats.org>

Senator Bettye Davis

Sponsor Statement

SB 35 "An Act extending the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; and providing for an effective date."

SB 35 extends the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council to June 30, 2013. Suicide is a very serious public health concern in Alaska, particularly among young males and the Alaska native population. Extension of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council is important in curtailing this avoidable loss of life. The mission of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council is to advise the governor and the legislature on issues relating to suicide. In collaboration with communities, faith-based organizations, and public-private entities, the Council works to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans by reducing suicide and its effect on individuals and communities.

The Executive Summary of the July, 2005 study by the Alaska Injury Prevention Center funded by Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority "Alaska Suicide Hospitalizations, 2001-2002," reported that in 2002 32,000 people took their own lives in the United States, and 20 times that number sought treatment for self-inflicted injuries. Alaska had the highest age-adjusted suicide rate of all the states in 2002 at 21.12 per 100,000 population, which is nearly twice that of the U.S. rate of 10.99 per 100,000. An average of 125 people die from suicide each year in Alaska, making it the number one cause of death for Alaskans under the age of 50 years (if unintentional injuries are examined individually instead of in groups).

Hospitalizations for suicide per the above study make a compelling case for the prevention of suicide and new insights into this dramatic public health problem. Over \$4 million in hospital costs alone is spent in public funds each year to care for suicide attempts. This did not include physicians' and specialists' costs. While the toll on society and family members by suicide may be incalculable, significant numbers were revealed:

- The average age for the patients was 30 years.
- The average length of each hospital stay was 4 days, with a range of 1 to 366.
- The average cost per case was \$8,986.
- Over 75% of the hospital costs were paid through public funding sources.
- 15% of hospital costs had to be written-off for patients' inability to pay.

The unabated high rate of suicide in Alaska demands continued attention and effort and earnestly urges, if not compels, the extension of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council. A subsequent study to the above by the Alaska Injury Prevention Center from 9/1/03-8/31/06 found 426 suicides in Alaska during this 36-month period, with the continuing rate of suicide at over 21/100,000. Males outnumbered females 4 to 1. The age-group 20-29 had both the greatest number of suicides and the highest rate per 100,000 population. Alaska Natives had a significantly higher average rate of suicide than the non-Native population (51.4/100,000 compared to 16.9/100,000). The leading cause of death was firearms with toxicology reports in 1/3 of the cases. Alcohol was found in 44% of the toxicology tests and marijuana was found in 15%.

LEGAL SERVICES

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Mail Stop 3101

State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182
Deliveries to: 129 6th St., Rm. 329

MEMORANDUM

March 2, 2009

SUBJECT: Sectional summary of CSSB 35(HSS), relating to the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (Work Order No. 26-LS0229\E)

TO: Senator Bettye Davis
Chair of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee
Attn: Thomas Obermeyer

FROM: Alpheus Bullard *TLAB*
Legislative Counsel

You have requested a sectional summary of the above-described bill.

As a preliminary matter, note that a sectional summary of a bill should not be considered an authoritative interpretation of the bill and the bill itself is the best statement of its contents. If you would like an interpretation of the bill as it may apply to a particular set of circumstances, please advise.

Section 1. Adds a member to the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (Council), and changes the composition of the Council.

Section 2. Provides that legislative members of the Council are nonvoting members.

Section 3. Clarifies that the Council's presiding officer, and other officers that the Council may consider necessary, are elected by a majority of the Council's voting membership.

Section 4. Establishes that seven voting members of the Council constitute a forum.

Section 5. Extends the termination date of the Council to 2013.

Section 6. Provides an effective date.

TLAB:plm
09-130.plm

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA
2009 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Fiscal Note Number: 1
Bill Version: CSSB 35(HSS)
(S) Publish Date: 2/27/09

Identifier (file name): SB035-DHSS-SPC-01-23-09 Dept. Affected: Health & Social Services
Title: Extend Suicide Prevention Council RDU: Behavioral Health
Component: Suicide Prevention Council
Sponsor: Davis
Requester: Senate Health & Social Services Component Number: 2651

Expenditures/Revenues (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	Appropriation Required	Information					
	FY 2010	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Personal Services							
Travel		35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0
Contractual		30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6	30.6
Supplies		17.2	17.2	17.2	17.2	17.2	17.2
Equipment							
Land & Structures							
Grants & Claims							
Miscellaneous							
TOTAL OPERATING	0.0	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8

CAPITAL EXPENDITURES							
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CHANGE IN REVENUES (
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FUND SOURCE (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts							
1003 GF Match							
1004 GF							
1005 GF/Program Receipts							
1037 GF/Mental Health		82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8
Other Interagency Receipts							
TOTAL	0.0	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8	82.8

Estimate of any current year (FY2009) cost: 0.0

POSITIONS

Full-time							
Part-time							
Temporary							

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

The proposed bill extends the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) to June 30, 2013. The SSPC will continue to be assigned to the Division of Behavioral Health (DBH). The costs to DBH would include expenses related to the council meetings, teleconferences, presentations and suicide prevention public awareness campaigns.

Prepared by: Melissa Stone Phone 269-3410
Division: Behavioral Health Date/Time 1/23/09 12:00 AM
Approved by: William H. Hogan, Commissioner Date 1/23/2009
Dept. of Health & Social Services

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA
2009 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Fiscal Note Number: 2
Bill Version: CSSB 35(HSS)
(S) Publish Date: 2/27/09

Identifier (file name): SB035-DHSS-BHA-01-23-09 Dept. Affected: Health & Social Services
Title: Extend Suicide Prevention Council RDU: Behavioral Health
Sponsor: Davis Component: Behavioral Health Administration
Requester: Senate Health & Social Services Component Number: 2665

Expenditures/Revenues (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

	Appropriation Required	Information					
		FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
OPERATING EXPENDITURES							
Personal Services		46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3
Travel							
Contractual							
Supplies							
Equipment							
Land & Structures							
Grants & Claims							
Miscellaneous							
TOTAL OPERATING	0.0	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3

CAPITAL EXPENDITURES							
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CHANGE IN REVENUES (
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FUND SOURCE (Thousands of Dollars)

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1037 GF/Mental Health		46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3
Other Interagency Receipts							
TOTAL	0.0	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3	46.3

Estimate of any current year (FY2009) cost: 0.0

POSITIONS

Full-time		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Part-time							
Temporary							

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

The proposed bill extends the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) to June 30, 2013. The 0.5 FTE administrative support position, hired by the council, will continue to be assigned to the Division of Behavioral Health.

Prepared by: Melissa Stone Phone 269-3410
Division: Behavioral Health Date/Time 1/23/09 12:00 AM

Approved by: William H. Hogan, Commissioner Date 1/23/2009
Dept. of Health & Social Services

? Consider following
w/ other mental
Health groups -
Suburban

Alaska Suicide Hospitalizations 2001 - 2002

Alaska Injury
Prevention Center



Ron Perkins, MPH

Anchorage, Alaska

July 2005

This research was made possible with funding from:

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In 2002, nearly 32,000 people took their own lives in the United States, and estimates indicate that 20 times that number sought treatment for self-inflicted injuries. Alaska had the highest age-adjusted suicide rate of all the states in 2002 at 21.12, which is nearly double the U.S. rate of 10.99 per 100,000 population. An average of 125 people die from suicide each year in Alaska, making it the number one cause of death for Alaskans under the age of 50 years (if unintentional injuries are examined individually instead of grouped). The epidemiology for suicide deaths is very different from the epidemiology for suicidal acts that result in hospitalization. This analysis looks at the epidemiology and costs associated with hospitalizations for self-inflicted injuries.

RESULTS

Using data supplied by the Alaska Trauma Registry (ATR) and funding from the Alaska Mental Health Trust, the Alaska Injury Prevention Center (AIPC) conducted a thorough analysis of the 1,223 hospitalized suicide attempts in Alaska for 2001 and 2002. The epidemiology and hospital costs associated with this injury group are reported below.

A few of the interesting facts revealed by this study for Alaska's suicide attempts:

- ✓ The average age for the patients was 30 years.
- ✓ The average length of each hospital stay was 4 days, with a range of 1 to 366.
- ✓ The average hospital costs per year were \$5,508,363.
- ✓ The average cost per case was \$8,986.
- ✓ Over 75% of the hospital costs were paid through public funding sources.

More than \$4 million in "public funds" is spent each year to care for suicide attempts, and those are just the documented hospital costs. Physician's fees and other specialist's fees are usually not included in the hospital costs. Also not included in hospital costs are self-inflicted injuries that result in death or long-term disabilities. These suicidal acts take a huge toll on individuals and families and are very difficult to quantify.

CONCLUSIONS

The *Alaska Suicide Hospitalizations* analysis makes a compelling case for the prevention of suicide, and gives new insights into this dramatic public health problem. Hospitals must accept the loss of at least 15% of the costs due to the patients' inability to pay.

Alaska Suicide Follow-back Study Final Report

Study period September 1, 2003 to August 31, 2006

Prepared for the:

**Alaska State-wide Suicide Prevention Council
Alaska Department of Health and Social Services
Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority**

Submitted by the:

**Alaska Injury Prevention Center
Critical Illness and Trauma Foundation, Inc.
American Association of Suicidology**

Acknowledgements

The investigators gratefully acknowledge the support and cooperation of the following agencies and organizations in the completion of this study:

Alaska Statewide Suicide Prevention Council

Office of the Alaska State Medical Examiner

Alaska Department of Health and Social Services

Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority

Alaska Dept. of Public Safety – Alaska State Troopers

Anchorage Police Department

Other local police departments

Funding support:

The Alaska Suicide Follow Back Study was prepared for the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council and was substantially funded through the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.

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Executive Summary

Goals

There were two goals for the study: (1) to do an in-depth demographic analysis of the suicides in Alaska for three years from September 1, 2003 through August 31, 2006 and (2) to conduct interviews with key informants for as many suicide cases as possible. This report is divided into two sections, Section 1 addressing the epidemiological data and Section 2 addressing the data derived from the interviews.

Purpose

The purpose of the data gathering, reporting, and analysis was to better understand the etiology and antecedents of suicide among Alaskans, in order to identify potential points of intervention and strategies to reduce the rate of suicide.

Methods

Death certificates attributed to suicides occurring in Alaska between September 1, 2003 and August 31, 2006 were reviewed retrospectively. Information from the Alaska State Medical Examiner, State Troopers, and other law enforcement agencies was collated and reviewed for each suicide death. A cadre of Native and non-Native interviewers was trained in how to use the interview protocol and how to conduct follow-back interviews with survivors of the decedents. All information was entered into a secure database. All efforts to protect confidentiality were in accordance with the Institutional Review Board requirements of the Alaska Native Medical Center, the University of Alaska – Anchorage, and the National Institutes of Health (Certificate of Confidentiality).

Results

There were 426 suicides during the 36 month study period. The average annual suicide rate for the three year study period was 21.4/100,000 (U.S. Census, 2005 estimated population). Males out-numbered females 4 to 1. The age-group of 20 to 29 had both the greatest number of suicides and the highest rate per 100,000 population. Alaska Natives had a significantly higher average rate of suicide than the non-Native population (51.4/100,000 compared to 16.9/100,000). The leading mechanism of death was firearms, accounting for 63% of the suicides. The use of handguns was more prevalent in the non-Native population whereas long guns were used more often by Alaska Natives. The EMS region with the greatest number of Native suicides was Region 4, which includes Bethel and the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Region 2, which includes the Northwest Arctic census area had the highest overall rate of suicide deaths. Follow-back interviews were conducted with 71 informants for 56 of the suicide decedents. Reported alcohol/drug use was the same for Urban as for Rural Native decedents. The same alcohol/drug use pattern was seen for Urban and for Rural non-Native decedents. Toxicology results were received for 33% of all the suicide cases. Alcohol was found in 44% of the toxicology tests and THC (marijuana) was found in 15%.

Conclusion

This study adds volumes of information to our existing knowledge of suicide in Alaska. More in-depth studies are already in progress, which will continue to add to our knowledge base while bringing in additional resources for prevention and treatment. The report also highlights the need for better death data collection, to quantify alcohol and drug involvement and other contributing factors.

Our Mission

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council advises the governor and legislature on issues relating to suicide. In collaboration with communities, faith-based organizations, and public-private entities, the Council works to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans by reducing suicide and its effect on individuals and communities.

- ▶ **The meaning of our logo**
- ▶ **Alaska Suicide Follow-back Study Final Report - Feb. 2007**
Alaska Injury Prevention Center, Ron Perkins
- ▶ **The Lifeline National Number**
- ▶ **Alaska Suicide Attempt Hospitalizations, 2001-2002 (pdf)**
Alaska Injury Prevention Center, Ron Perkins
- ▶ **Moving Forward**, the DHSS Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Plan (CIMHP), can be downloaded at the following website address:
- ▶ Discussion Assistance for Ramy's DVD

30 Second Radio Spots:

- ▶ Suicide Hurts (mp3)
- ▶ Tell Someone (mp3)
- ▶ Video Game (mp3)

Associated in-state links

- ▶ The Alaska Mental Health Board
- ▶ The Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse
- ▶ The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority
- ▶ ASIST - Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training

Annual Reports

- ▶ 2008 Annual Report (689 Kb .pdf file)
- ▶ 2007 Annual Report (550 Kb .pdf file)
- ▶ 2006 Annual Report (1.2 MB .pdf file)
- ▶ 2005 Annual Report (561 Kb .pdf file)
- ▶ 2004 Annual Report (1.2 Mb .pdf file)
- ▶ 2003 Annual Report (515 Kb .pdf file)
- ▶ 2002 Annual Report (291 Kb .pdf file)

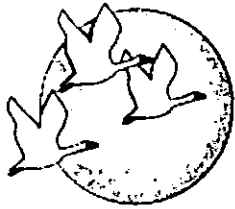
Alaska State Suicide Prevention Plan

- ▶ Download the State Plan (611 Kb)

Scheduled Meetings

Upcoming Meeting

- ▶ Statewide Suicide Prevention Council February 4-5, 2009, Goldbelt Hotel, In Juneau



Resources

Alaska Suicide-Related Resources

Alaska Suicide-Related Resources
Alaska Directories and Information Resources
Suicide, Mental Health and Related Issues in Alaska Native and American Indian Populations

National and International Resources

National Suicide Prevention Plans
National/International Suicide Prevention Organizations
National Youth Suicide Prevention Organizations
Suicide Prevention Resource Center **NEW!**
Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use **NEW!**
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSA)

Alaska State Suicide Prevention Plan

Alaska Suicide Prevention Plan (*611 Kb pdf file*)

Organizations Addressing Depression and Suicide

Suicide Training and Curricula/Programs
Clinical Resources

Looking for Help?

If you are feeling down or are looking for help for yourself or others, please talk to someone. Here are some resources.

**National Suicide
Prevention Lifeline**
1-800-273-8255

Alaska Community
Mental Health Centers

CARELINE
1-877-266-HELP



April 9, 2009

AARP Alaska
3601 C Street
Suite 1420
Anchorage, AK 99503T. 1-866-227-7447
F. 907-341-2270
TTY 1-877-434-7598
www.aarp.org/ak

The Honorable Lyman Hoffman, Co-Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Alaska State Capitol, Room 518
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

The Honorable Bert Stedman, Co-Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Alaska State Capitol, Room 516
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

RE: SB 35 (Davis)—Support

Dear Co-Chairs Hoffman and Stedman:

On behalf of the members of AARP in Alaska, we encourage you and your colleagues on the Senate Finance Committee to support SB 35, authored by Senator Bettye Davis and co-sponsored by Senators Johnny Ellis and Gene Therriault.

Unfortunately, Alaska has a high rate of suicide. Many of these suicides include mid-life and older Alaskans. The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council needs to continue its work and address this issue for our citizens. The Council still has much to do and, in our opinion, should be allowed to continue for another four years.

AARP requests an "AYE" vote on SB 35.

Should you have any questions about our position, please feel free to contact me (586-3637) or Patrick Luby, AARP Advocacy Director (907-762-3314).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marie Darlin, Coordinator
AARP Capital City Task Force
415 Willoughby Avenue, Apt. 506
Juneau, AK 99801
586-3637 (voice)
463-3580 (fax)

CC: Senator Joe Thomas Senator Johnny Ellis
 Senator Charlie Huggins Senator Bettye Davis
 Senator Donald Olson

Jennie Chin Hansen, President
William D. Novelli, Chief Executive Officer

CS for SENATE BILL ³⁵~~423~~ HB-123
Sam Trivette

- My wife and I lost our son to suicide on 6-28-07
- He worked half time as an intern at the University of Alaska/Fairbanks Police Department & won high praise
- He would have entered his Junior at UAS in the criminal justice program in the fall of 2007
- For two weeks straight after Pete's death, not ONE day went past without at least one person telling us of a suicide in their family or close friend's circle
- In a recent one year period, 7 young people took their lives in the Juneau area alone
- Young people, with the highest potential, have the highest suicide rate, with older seniors coming in a very close second
- We found out after Pete's death that he suffered from depression even while in high school
- At that time, there was no program in the school system to educate students, teachers or parents on depression and suicide issues
- Recently, the Juneau School District added a component in the high school curriculum that educates students on the basic issues regarding depression and provides them ideas to help their friends and classmates who might be experiencing depression. This program was piloted in another Alaska school district, which experienced NO suicides after its implementation
- This program has been supported by the SPC
- The SPC has implemented a number of other initiatives at various local levels [such as community task forces]
- The Suicide Prevention Council is the organization that is focused on getting out information to all our citizens, that THEY can help lower the rate of suicide. No one else is.
- Professional training, seminars, state wide and national teleconferences, are all issues the SPC has supported to help reduce the incidents of suicide.
- We believe the SPC is beginning to have an impact on depression and suicide in Alaska and urge you extend the Council for the next 4 years.

Alaska State Legislature

Interim: (May - Dec.)
716 W. 4th Ave
Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone: (907) 269-0144
Fax: (907) 269-0148



Session: (Jan. - May)
State Capitol, Suite 30
Juneau, AK 99801-1182
Phone: (907) 465-3822
Fax: (907) 465-3756
Toll free: (800) 770-3822

[Senator Bettye Davis@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Senator_Bettye_Davis@legis.state.ak.us)
<http://www.akdemocrats.org>

Office of Senator Bettye Davis

April 10, 2009
Senator Charlie Huggins, Chair
Senate Rules Committee

RE: Request to calendar SB 35, "An Act extending the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council; and providing for an effective date."


Dear Senator Huggins,

Senator Davis respectfully requests that Senate Rules promptly calendar SB 35 which extends the termination date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council to June 30, 2013. The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council Suicide sunsets June 30, 2009, so immediate action is required if the state is to help curtail this avoidable loss of life by suicide, particularly by so many young people each year. The mission of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council is to advise the governor and the legislature on issues relating to suicide. In collaboration with communities, faith-based organizations, and public-private entities, the Council works to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans by reducing suicide and its devastating effect on individuals, families, and communities. Over 125 Alaskans die each year by suicide, which is twice the national average per capita. Suicide is four times more prevalent among young males than females. Guns, alcohol, drugs, and unattended depression are often involved.

Attached in order are the following:

1. Sponsor Statement
2. The most recent version of the bill
3. Sectional analysis
4. Fiscal Notes
5. Additional Documentation

Sincerely,


Thomas S. Obermeyer
Legislative Administrative Assistant

Lynda Zaugg

From: Sam Trivette [samtriv@gci.net]
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 2:28 PM
To: Lynda Zaugg
Subject: CS SB 35

Attachments: SENATE BILL 35 4-9-09.doc



SENATE BILL 35
4-9-09.doc (25...

Lynda,
Attached is the essence what I will be saying at tomorrow's hearing.
Haven't timed it, but should be well under 3 minutes?
Look forward to getting the bill to the floor.
Sam

*Presented before
Sen Fin on 4/10/09*

Lynda Zaugg

From: Casto, L Diane (HSS) [l.casto@alaska.gov]
Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2009 3:07 PM
To: Lynda Zaugg
Subject: CS for SB 35

Hello Lynda – Would it be possible to get a copy of the CS for SB 35 that was adopted and passed out of committee today? I realize it will eventually be on BASIS, but was hoping you could provide a scanned or faxed copy in the interim. My fax number is 465-1189. Thanks so much.

L. Diane Casto, MPA

Manager, Prevention & Early Intervention Services

DHSS, Behavioral Health

907-465-1188

Partners Promoting Healthy Communities

Lynda Zaugg

From: Laughlin, Wilda J (HSS) [wilda.laughlin@alaska.gov]
Sent: Friday, February 13, 2009 4:04 PM
To: Lynda Zaugg; Casto, L Diane (HSS); Thomas Obermeyer, Sen. Johnny Ellis
Subject: SB 35 Suicide prevention council membership
Attachments: SSPC Recommended changes to Membership Compositions-02-09.doc

The Governor's office and Department of Health and Social Services support the attached recommendations for changes to membership of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council.

Please let me know if you need anything else on this.
w.

SB 35

have new as drafted

*DHSS
Langness*

Recommended changes to Statewide Suicide Council Membership Compositions.
Recommendations made by the SSPC membership at their quarterly meeting, February 4, 2009
in Juneau, AK.

Proposed changes:

1. The four (4) legislative members appointed by the Legislature would become advisory in nature and would no longer be voting members. This would reduce the difficulty obtaining a quorum at meetings.
2. Change the "two members who are employed in the executive branch of state government" (a.) to add the language: one person representing the DHSS and one person representing the DEED.
3. Change "one person who is a counselor in a secondary school to "(e.) an employee from a secondary school system such as, but not limited to, a teacher, administrator, counselor, nurse or other school personnel.
4. Change "one adult who is active in a statewide youth organization" (f.) to one person who is active in a youth organization.
5. Change "one person who is under the age of 18" (j.) to one person who is enrolled in high school.
6. Add one public member at large.

Gary, the two folks

From: Gary Miller [mailto:gmler_juneauak@hotmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2009 7:40 AM
To: Lynda Zaugg
Cc: Sam RPEA_Trivette
Subject: Ketchikan

Lynda, Sam Trivette said that you know two people who live in Ketchikan who may be interested in forming an RPEA chapter. Would you mind giving me their names? Sam and I would love to see a chapter form in Ketchikan.

Thanks.

Gary Miller
20135 Cohen Dr
Juneau, AK 99801-8211
789-3757
gmler_juneauak@hotmail.com

Rediscover Hotmail®: Now available on your iPhone or BlackBerry [Check it out.](#)

2/12

SB 35

Wilda, my note to myself reflects on the 5th was that H&SS was reviewing the proposed changes made by the Suicide Co at their quarterly meeting - what is the status of your review? Lynda

2/13 - T.C for Wilda
still working out w board office - what
they want to do -
a not just a straight sign off " on
board proposal -

2/13 - email for Wilda -
Support -

Lynda Zaugg

From: Thomas Obermeyer
Sent: Monday, January 26, 2009 1:06 PM
To: Don Burrell; Lynda Zaugg
Subject: revised sponsor statement sb 35 to post
Attachments: SB 35 Sponsor Statement 1-23-09.doc

re SB 35

Revised: Adding word Alaska to "native population" in first paragraph.

Lynda Zaugg

From: Thomas Obermeyer
Sent: Monday, January 26, 2009 4:41 PM
To: Lynda Zaugg
Subject: RE: SB 35 sponsor statement

Lynda,

It is insignificant that I added one word: "Alaska" before "native" in the first paragraph. You can ignore it or re-post the revised on the web. I added "Alaska" before "native" in the first paragraph to be more accurate, i.e., less vague, and also to show more respect to Alaska natives.

The more important issue is that Senator Davis asked for review of composition of the council by the administration and department – for possible amendment – before rehearing the bill and approving termination date. Clearly, the 4-year extension of termination date versus the more common 8 years, as explained in audit by Pat Davidson, shows there may be problems with the council as well as the bill.

Tom

From: Lynda Zaugg
Sent: Monday, January 26, 2009 4:14 PM
To: Thomas Obermeyer
Subject: RE: SB 35 sponsor statement

Tom, is this an updated version? Lynda

From: Thomas Obermeyer
Sent: Monday, January 26, 2009 1:01 PM
To: Don Burrell; Lynda Zaugg
Subject: SB 35 sponsor statement

dothaneagle.com
DOTHAN EAGLE Dothan, Alabama

Partners: [Enterprise Ledger](#) | [JC Floridan](#)
Friday, January 23, 2009 |
Newton, AL 70° Feels Like: 70° Clear

Lilly Ledbetter Bill: House approves bill to fight wage discrimination



AP Photo/Ron Edmonds, FILE

Pay Equity pioneer Lily Ledbetter addresses the Democratic National Convention in Denver, Tuesday, Aug. 26, 2008 file photo. Democrats are ushering in what they believe will be a new labor-friendly era in Washington with House votes on two bills aimed at helping women fight pay discrimination in the workplace. The House was to vote on the bills Friday Jan. 9, 2009, and they could reach Barack Obama's desk soon after he enters the White House. One of the bills, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, is a response to a 2007 Supreme Court decision that made it more difficult to sue over past pay discrimination.

Text size: [small](#) | [medium](#) | [large](#)

BY JIM ABRAMS
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER
Published: January 9, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) — Energized by the prospects of a pro-labor president, House Democrats marked the first week of the new Congress Friday by pushing through two bills to help workers, particularly women, who are victims of pay discrimination.

Unlike President George W. Bush, who threatened to veto the two bills when they came up in the last session of Congress, President-elect Barack Obama has embraced them.

"Today we face a transformational moment," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., chief sponsor of the Paycheck Fairness Act. "With a new Congress, a new administration, we have a chance to finally provide equal pay for equal work and make opportunity real for millions of American women."

The Lilly Ledbetter Act would reverse a 2007 Supreme Court ruling that a worker must file claims of wage discrimination within 180 days of the first decision to pay that worker less, even if the person was unaware of the pay disparity. The Paycheck Fairness Act would close loopholes that have enabled employers to evade the 1963 law requiring equal pay for equal work. The first passed 247-171, the second 256-163.

The Ledbetter bill could reach the Senate floor as early as next week. Democrats, who have increased their majority in the Senate, last year fell three votes short of shutting off a GOP-led filibuster that blocked the bill after it passed the House.

Republican opponents of the two measures argued that they would foster lawsuits against businesses and mainly benefit trial lawyers.

It sends a signal, said Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon of California, senior Republican on the Education and Labor Committee, "that the first substantive order of business is not job creation or tax relief but rather a trial lawyer boondoggle that can put jobs and worker pensions in jeopardy."

Lilly Ledbetter was a supervisor at a Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. plant in Gadsden, Ala. She sued the company over pay discrimination when she learned, shortly before retiring after a 19-year career there, that she earned less than any male supervisor. A jury ruled in her favor, but the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 vote, threw out her complaint, saying she had failed to sue within the 180-day deadline after a discriminatory pay decision was made.

"This ruling just doesn't make sense in the real world," Ledbetter said in a telephone news conference Thursday. "In a lot of places you could get fired for asking your co-workers how much they are making."

W. Dean DeLoach - Sen. Equity Office

The House bill would clarify that each paycheck resulting from discrimination would constitute a new violation, extending the 180-day statute of limitations.

"It should not become the law of the land that if you are an employer and can hide discrimination for 180 days you can get away with it," said Rep. Robert Andrews, D-N.J.

The liberal Alliance for Justice said the Supreme Court decision already had seriously impacted worker rights: It said that since the 2007 ruling, federal and other courts had cited Ledbetter in 347 cases involving pay discrimination and other issues such as fair housing and the availability of sports programs for women.

The Paycheck Fairness Act puts gender-based discrimination on an equal footing with other forms of discrimination in seeking compensatory and punitive damages. It also puts the burden on employers to prove that any disparities in wages are job-related and not sex-based, and bars employers from retaliating against workers who discuss or disclose salary information with their co-workers.

The early foray into labor rights issues is a prelude to what could be the most controversial bill that Congress tackles in the first year of the Obama administration — legislation to take away the right of employers to demand secret-ballot elections by workers before unions could be recognized.

Business groups maintain the Employee Free Choice Act is an affront to democratic principles. Unions say companies have used secret ballots to intimidate pro-union workers and that the bill could help reverse the downward trend in union membership.

The Ledbetter bill is H.R. 11. The Paycheck Fairness Act is H.R. 12.

On the Net:

Congress: <http://thomas.loc.gov>

1) Arizona = Alaska?
2) copy of Paycheck Fairness Act

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

LEGISLATIVE BUDGET AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Division of Legislative Audit



P.O. Box 113300
Juneau, AK 99811-3300
(907) 465-3830
FAX (907) 465-2347
legaudit@legis.state.ak.us

November 4, 2008

Members of the Legislative Budget
and Audit Committee:

In accordance with the provisions of Title 24 and Title 44 of the Alaska Statutes (sunset legislation), the attached report is submitted for your review.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
STATEWIDE SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL
SUNSET REVIEW
November 4, 2008

Audit Control Number
06-20055-08

The review was conducted as required by AS 44.66.050 and under the authority of AS 24.20.271(1). Currently, under AS 44.66.010(a)(8), the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (council) is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 2009. We recommend the legislature extend the termination date of the council until June 30, 2013.

Four of the fifteen voting members of the council are legislators. Since the Legislative Audit Division is part of the legislative branch, our agency does not meet the independence standard required by generally accepted government auditing standards. Therefore, we are disclosing our lack of adherence to the independence auditing standard.

Except for the independence standard discussed above, the audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Fieldwork procedures utilized in the course of developing the findings and discussion presented in this report are discussed in the Objectives, Scope, and Methodology.

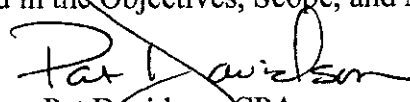

Pat Davidson, CPA
Legislative Auditor

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OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

In accordance with Titles 24 and 44 of the Alaska Statutes, we have reviewed the activities of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) to determine if there is a demonstrated public need for its continued existence and if it has been operating in an efficient and effective manner.

As required by AS 44.66.050(a), the legislative committee of reference shall consider this report as part of the oversight process in determining if the termination date of the council should be extended. State law currently specifies SSPC will terminate on June 30, 2009. If no action is taken by the legislature, the council will have one year from that date to conclude its administrative operations.

Objectives

The three central, interrelated objectives of our report are:

1. To determine if the termination date of the council should be extended.
2. To determine if the council is operating in the public interest.
3. To provide a current status on the recommendations made in the prior report.

Our assessment of the operations and performance of the council was based on criteria set out in AS 44.66.050(c). Criteria set out in this statute relate to the determination of a demonstrated public need for the council.

Scope and Methodology

Auditors and audit organizations are required to be independent in both fact and appearance to the entities being audited. Audit organizations are presumed to be organizationally independent per generally accepted government auditing standards under various situations. One of those situations, which is applicable to the Division of Legislative Audit, is when the,

. . . audit organization is in a different branch of government within the same level of government as the audited entity; for example, legislative auditors auditing an executive branch program.

The Division of Legislative Audit does not meet the organizational independence requirements because four of the fifteen voting members of SSPC are members of the Alaska State Legislature. Readers of this report may not view the conclusions, findings, and

recommendations as impartial because of the lack of organizational independence. Nevertheless, we conducted the audit of SSPC as required by AS 24.20.271 and AS 44.66.050.

Our audit reviewed the operations and activities of the council from FY 05 through FY 08.

During the course of our examination, we reviewed and evaluated the following:

- Applicable statutes and regulations.
- Budget documents, session laws, and other legislative information related to the council's operations.
- Council meeting minutes, bi-laws, and website.
- Annual reports to the legislature and governor.
- Financial reports from the State Accounting System.
- The *Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan*.
- Alaska Injury Prevention Center's follow-back studies to the council.
- Other documents related to the council's operations and mission, as necessary.

In addition, we interviewed:

- Various SSPC members, SSPC coordinators, and staff under the Department of Health and Social Services.
- Board members, executive directors and other staff of the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA), Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB) and Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA).

We also attended the following meetings:

- May 5-6, 2008 meeting of SSPC.
- June 13, 2008 meeting of representatives from SSPC, Division of Behavioral Health, Division of Senior and Disability Services, the Alaska Commission on Aging, AMHTA, ABADA, AMHB, and the Governor's Council on Disability and Special Education.
- June 17, 2008 SSPC teleconference for a working session on the revision of the Suicide Prevention Plan.

ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION

Under AS 44.29.350, the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) is charged with advising the legislature and the governor on,

...actions that can and should be taken to improve health and wellness throughout the state by reducing suicide and its effect on individuals, families, and communities.

In addition to this advisory role, the council's activities include planning, coordinating, educating, training, and providing technical support on the prevention of suicide.

Exhibit 1

The council consists of 15 members. There are two senators, two representatives, two executive branch employees, and nine public members. The senate seats and the representative seats are appointed by the president of the senate and the speaker of the house, respectively. The executive branch and public seats are appointed by the governor.

Alaska Statute 44.29.300 specifies the public seats be filled by,

...one member of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse; one member of the Alaska Mental Health Board; one person recommended by the Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc.; one person who is a counselor in a secondary school; one adult who is active in a statewide youth organization; one person who has experienced the death by suicide of a member of the person's family; one person who resides in a rural community in the state that is not connected by road or the Alaska marine highway to the main road system of the state; one person who is a member of the clergy; and one person who is under the age of 18.

Council Members

As of September 30, 2008

Officers:

Brenda Moore, Public, Chair
Pat Donelson, Public, Chair-Elect
Renee Gayhart, DHSS, Treasurer

Other Members:

Charles Jones, Public
Celena Powder, Public
William Martin, Public
Bernard Gatewood, Public
Vacant, Public
Vacant, Public
Vacant, Public
Bill Hogan, DHSS
Johnny Ellis, Senate
Kim Elton, Senate
Woodie Salmon, House
Reggie Joule, House

Except for the members of the House of Representatives who serve two years, council members serve staggered four-year terms.

The council is staffed by a coordinator, who, by statute, is employed by the council and directly responsible to the council. As of July 1, 2008, the coordinator is the project manager for the Prevention and Early Intervention section. The coordinator is employed for the council on a part-time basis and is assisted by a project coordinator from the same division.

The council receives administrative assistance from the Department of Health and Social Services.

REPORT CONCLUSIONS

Under AS 44.66.010(a)(8), the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) will terminate on June 30, 2009. If the legislature does not take action to extend the termination date, the council will have one year to administratively conclude its affairs.

Alaska Statute 44.29.350 defines the purpose of the council.

The council shall serve in an advisory capacity to the legislature and the governor with respect to what actions can and should be taken to...

The statute continues, listing the six areas where the council should advise the legislature and the governor. In addition to advising the legislature through testimony to the House and Senate Committees, the council has taken on a direct role in various areas. These areas include broadening the public awareness of suicide and the related risk factors, the development of a statewide suicide prevention plan, and other examples which are discussed in more detail in the Analysis of Public Need section of this report.

Suicide remains a major public health problem in Alaska. Over the last seven years, the crude rate¹ for suicide has ranged from over 16 to 23, while the national average crude rate for suicide was 11 in 2005².

Exhibit 2

Suicides of Alaska Residents By Year*							
	-----Year of Death-----						
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Deaths	103	131	123	154	127	132	146
Crude Rate	16.3	20.5	19	23.4	19.1	19.7	21.6

*2006 and 2007 data is still provisional and subject to change.
Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

In addition to the rate of suicide being significantly higher than the national average, the profile of those committing suicide is also substantially different. In national statistics, elderly individuals are more likely to commit suicide; in Alaska, suicide is most commonly committed by individuals in their 20s. Suicide rates in Alaska are also disproportionately high in the native population.

¹ Crude rate is the number of suicides per 100,000 population.

² USA Suicide: 2005 Official Final Data, from American Association of Suicidology on its website, <http://www.suicidology.org>.

In developing our conclusion on whether SSPC's termination date should be extended, we evaluated SSPC's operations using the 11 factors set out in AS 44.66.050(c) to determine if the council has demonstrated a public need for its continued operation.

We found no direct correlation between the activities of the council and the change in the suicide rate for any particular year. However, given that the council's role is primarily advisory and suicide is a public health concern that is often linked with mental illness and substance abuse, both which are long term health issues, it is unlikely that a direct identifiable correlation will ever be clearly visible.

However, through the efforts of the council we have seen a broader and more public acknowledgement of the problem of suicide in Alaska. We saw the council responding to communities by working to revise the statewide suicide prevention plan, making it less clinical and more user-friendly. The council and the Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Behavioral Health (DHSS, DBH) have proposed an initiative to develop a cross-disciplinary, community-driven, and research-based approach to reducing the number of deaths by suicide in Alaska. A Suicide Prevention Strategy and Implementation Plan will be available to the legislature by December 15, 2008.

Overall, we found that the council is operating in the public interest and spearheading efforts that are necessary to address the public health concern of suicide. Therefore, we recommend the legislature extend the termination date of the council to June 30, 2013.

The four year extension is recommended because of the following issues:

- At the end of FY 08, the council was organizationally aligned with the Prevention and Early Intervention section, Division of Behavioral Health. A key to enhancing the effectiveness of the council is a good working relationship between the council and DBH, each focused on its own mission – coordinating but not duplicating. A limited extension will allow for a reevaluation of whether the closer alignment with DBH has impeded the independent voice of the council.
- Secondly, the membership requirements for appointment to the council make it difficult to fill all the seats and to ensure sufficient participation to meet quorum requirements. Again, a limited extension will allow a timely reexamination of this problem.

These issues are more fully discussed in the Findings and Recommendations section of this report.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation No. 1

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) should, in accordance with statutes, appoint its own coordinator and perform annual performance reviews.

Effective July 1, 2008, the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) assigned SSPC coordinator responsibilities to the Prevention and Early Intervention section³ manager in the Division of Behavioral Health (DBH). This SSPC coordinator appointment was not made in accordance with the statutes and appears to diminish SSPC's autonomy and independent voice with the governor and legislature. Also, the coordinator may be placed in a position with potentially conflicting responsibilities between the council and DBH.

DHSS' decision was based on department personnel resource needs and a desire to align the activities of the council and the section.

The hiring, supervision, and evaluation of the SSPC coordinator are part of the council's rights and responsibilities per the statutes.⁴ DHSS has traditionally assisted the council with the coordinator's selection. However, SSPC was not involved in the latest selection. Also, the council has not annually evaluated the coordinator's performance for at least the past four years. Neglecting these statutory requirements may have diminished the council's ability to maintain an independence voice.

We recommend the council either accept the current coordinator through a formal vote or initiate actions to hire a new coordinator. In addition, it is critical that the council conduct annual performance evaluations as required by statute, particularly if the coordinator is a DBH employee. Only through the council's interest in remaining autonomous can its independent voice be assured.

Recommendation No. 2

The legislature should consider modifying the composition of council membership.

During FY 05 – FY 08, there were excessive vacancies on the council and significant absences by council members at its meetings. Additionally, those being appointed to the

³ Prevention and Early Intervention is the section responsible for DHSS programs that address suicide prevention.

⁴ Alaska Statute 44.29.330(b) states,

The council may employ a coordinator to assist the council. The coordinator is in the partially exempt service. The coordinator shall be directly responsible to the council in the performance of the coordinator's duties. The council shall annually review the performance of the coordinator.

council did not always meet the statutory qualifications for the position. Exhibit 3 illustrates the extent of vacancies and absences over the last four years.

Exhibit 3

Statutory Qualifications	Do incumbents meet the qualifications	Rate of attendance at SSPC meeting FY 05 – FY 08
Four legislator seats: Senate majority member Senate minority member House majority member House minority member	Yes No No Yes	Overall 15%
Two persons employed by the executive branch of state government	Yes	Overall 73%
A member of the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse	Yes	60%
A member of the Alaska Mental Health Board	Yes	100%
A person recommended by the Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc.	Yes	100%
A person who is a secondary school counselor	No ⁵	80%
A person who is an adult and active in statewide youth organizations	Yes	73%
A person whose family has experienced death by suicide	Vacant ⁶	33%
A person who lives in a rural community – not connected by either the road system or the marine highway	Vacant ⁷	0%
A member of the clergy	Yes	93%
A person under the age of 18	Yes	33%
Overall Average⁸		54%

The composition of the council’s membership is established in AS 44.29.300 and includes very specific qualifications which have created difficulties in filling the positions. Vacancies combined with low attendance rates make it difficult for the council to establish a quorum at its meetings.

The legislature should consider changes to AS 44.29.300 to broaden the qualifications of council members to ensure that appointees are interested in the work of the council and can

⁵ The current incumbent is a secondary school principal.

⁶ This position has been vacant since November 2005.

⁷ This position has been vacant for more than 3 of the 4 years between FY 05 and FY 08.

⁸ This average includes one member appointed to the council that does not meet any of the statutory criteria. This member’s attendance over the last 4 years has been at 87%.

make the time commitment necessary to serve. Additionally, consideration should be given to making legislative members non-voting to prevent potential quorum issues.

Current Status of Prior Audit Recommendations

Prior Recommendation No. 1

The Division of Behavioral Health Community-based Suicide Prevention Program coordinator should ensure prevention programs conform to the statewide suicide prevention plan .

Current Status

This recommendation is no longer an issue. Starting in FY 06, the State has followed a national trend to provide grants on a more comprehensive programmatic basis. Grant funds are awarded in a way that allows communities to focus the funds according to local priorities, rather than awarding separate grants for mental health, substance abuse, or suicide programs.

Additionally, the council has undertaken a rewrite of the statewide suicide prevention plan to make it more user-friendly, so Alaskan communities can better use the plan in developing their grant activities and community plans.

Prior Recommendation No. 2

The administrative manager for Department of Health and Social Services Boards and Commission and the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council coordinator should develop a more formalized information system of reporting financial information to the council.

Current Status

This recommendation has been resolved. Council members are receiving budget and financial reports as part of their meeting packets.

Prior Recommendation No. 3

The council should ensure it provides public notice of all council meetings as required by Alaska Statute 44.62.310.

Current Status

This recommendation has been resolved.

Prior Recommendation No. 4

The Office of the Governor should make appointments to the council in a timely manner.

Current Status

Appointments to the council continue to be a problem. See current Recommendation No. 2.

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A N A L Y S I S O F P U B L I C N E E D

The following analysis of commission activities relates to the public need factors defined in the sunset law, AS 44.66.050. This analysis was not intended to be comprehensive, but to address those areas we were able to cover within the scope of our review.

Determine the extent to which the board, commission, or program has operated in the public interest.

To assess whether the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) has operated in the public interest, we measured the council's activities against objectives set out by the legislature for SSPC in state law, at AS 44.29.350.⁹ From our review of council activities, we conclude SSPC has reasonably addressed its statutory objectives.

The council, as an advisory body, has made presentations to the House and Senate Committees on Health, Education and Social Services. Additionally, they provide the legislature and the governor with the council's annual report.

The council also actively participates in the six areas in which they are intended to advise the legislature and the governor. The following discussion describes the council's areas of active participation:

1. Actions to be taken to improve health and wellness by reducing suicide.

During FY 08, the council, in partnership with Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Behavioral Health (DHSS, DBH), proposed the Alaska Suicide Prevention Initiative to the governor and the legislature. The initiative proposed developing a cross-disciplinary, community-driven and research-based approach to reduce the number of deaths by suicide in Alaska. The initiative addressed potential activities from FY 09 through FY 13. The FY 09 budget included an increment dedicated to the development of the Suicide Prevention Strategy and Implementation Plan, which is to be completed by December 15, 2008.

⁹ Alaska Statute 44.29.350 states,

The council shall serve in an advisory capacity to the legislature and the governor with respect to what actions can and should be taken to (1) improve health and wellness throughout the state by reducing suicide and its effects on individuals, families, and communities; (2) broaden the public's awareness of suicide and the risk factors related to suicide; (3) enhance suicide prevention services and programs throughout the state; (4) develop healthy communities through comprehensive, collaborative, community-based and faith-based approaches; (5) develop and implement a statewide suicide prevention plan; and (6) strengthen existing and build new partnerships between public and private entities that will advance suicide prevention efforts in the state.

2. Increasing public awareness of suicide and the related risk factors.

The council has become increasingly diligent in this area. The council continues to maintain a website¹⁰ that provides suicide statistics, risk factors, and prevention. Additionally, the website provides links to resources such as the council's annual reports and statewide suicide prevention plan.

The council participated in many conferences and workshops during FY 05 through FY 08, making presentations or providing information displays. The council also purchased and distributed items such as pens, pencils, magnets, and posters to those needing support for suicide prevention related functions.

In 2006 the council initiated the "Live Your Dream" bracelet campaign which targets the State's youth population. This has been viewed as particularly popular and successful in spreading suicide awareness.

The council has contributed to the "YOU KNOW ME" media campaign which focuses on suicide prevention awareness. The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) has sponsored the council in this endeavor since 2005.

3. Enhance suicide prevention services and programs throughout the State.

Overall, the council enhances suicide prevention services and programs by directly providing information or providing direction to other knowledgeable sources. Throughout the year, the council receives two to three requests per week for information or technical assistance. Their web site generates questions from the public and other organizations who then request informational materials from the council. As appropriate, they also provide studies, DVDs, books, and other materials on suicide and suicide prevention.

Other examples of SSPC's enhancement of suicide prevention services include:

- Involvement in the certification of Careline¹¹ and DBH's targeted gatekeeper training.¹²
- Having the Careline phone number placed in phone books across the State.

¹⁰ <http://health.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention/default.htm>

¹¹ Careline is Alaska's statewide toll-free crisis intervention and assistance hotline.

¹² DBH has contracted for the development of a training curriculum specific to Alaska. Gatekeepers are individuals who have face-to-face contact with large numbers of people in their community. The council's role in the initiative is to review the developed curriculum and provide feedback.

- Sponsoring travel for communities that needed assistance to attend gatekeeper training.
- Providing funds which allowed the Careline project manager, the Boys & Girls Club representative, and the Survivor Group representative to attend the American Association of Suicidology Conference in 2006.

4. Develop healthy communities through comprehensive, collaborative, community-based and faith-based approaches.

The council has maintained faith-based partnerships through some SSPC members' participation in faith-based organizations. Other community approaches have included:

- Sponsoring an Alaska State Council on the Arts workshop in Bethel to orient artists and arts organizations to programs, resources, and grant opportunities.
- Providing a liaison to assist grassroots community members as they researched and established a nonprofit organization whose mission is suicide prevention, awareness, and support of the survivors.
- Providing technical support to community programs providing suicide prevention services via research, best practices updates, referral resources, training, and conference opportunities.
- Recommending the Boys & Girls Clubs' staff development director receive training and certification as a gatekeeper¹³ trainer.

5. Develop and implement a statewide suicide prevention plan.

SSPC completed its first statewide plan in 2004, and it followed the format of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and existing plans from other states. However, communities did not find the plan user-friendly in providing guidance in aligning their grant activities and community plans with the statewide plan. The council is now revising the statewide plan to make it more relevant to the granting process for the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Prevention and Early Intervention Services grants.

6. Collaborating on planning activities with other related agencies.

In 2005 SSPC established a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (ABADA), the Alaska Mental Health Board (AMHB), and DHSS. In 2006 an MOA was established with AMHTA. The purpose of the MOAs is coordination and collaboration to achieve the best outcomes for their targeted

¹³ See footnote 12 for more information about gatekeepers.

beneficiaries. Their websites are interlinked and these entities participate in reciprocal reporting.

Other boards that SSPC collaborates with include Alaska Commission on Aging, Alaska Brain Injury Network, Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and Division of Behavioral Health. While there is reciprocal reporting between these boards, MOAs have not yet been established.

Determine the extent to which the operation of the board, commission, or agency program has been impeded or enhanced by existing statutes, procedures, and practices that it has adopted, and any other matter, including budgetary, resource, and personnel matters.

SSPC has not operated in strict compliance with the statutes in regards to the composition of the council and some personnel matters. Specifically:

1. SSPC was not involved in hiring its latest coordinator, a position directly responsible to the council; nor has the council reviewed the coordinator's performance for any of the past four years. These are requirements stated in AS 44.29.330. At least in appearance, these moves could impede the council's independence and autonomy when advising the legislature and the governor. (See Recommendation No. 1)
2. Some council members either do not meet the positions' requirements as presented in the statutes or have excessive absences from the board meetings and other SSPC activities. (See Recommendation No. 2)

Exhibit 4

Schedule of Operating Expenditure and Funding Sources				
(Unaudited)				
	<u>FY 05</u>	<u>FY 06</u>	<u>FY 07</u>	<u>FY 08</u>
Expenditures				
Personal Services	\$ 18,300	\$ 26,028	\$ 22,307	\$ 35,915
Travel	23,847	32,636	41,155	51,072
Services	33,335	37,515	19,821	18,205
Commodities	<u>14,383</u>	<u>6,336</u>	<u>8,461</u>	<u>2,142</u>
Total Operating Expenditures	\$ 89,865	\$ 102,515	\$ 91,744	\$ 107,334
Funding Sources				
General Fund Appropriations	<u>\$ 89,865</u>	<u>\$ 102,515</u>	<u>\$ 91,744</u>	<u>\$ 107,334</u>
Total Funding	\$ 89,865	\$ 102,515	\$ 91,744	\$ 107,334

Determine the extent to which the board, commission, or agency has recommended statutory changes that are generally of benefit to the public interest.

The council has not pursued any statutory changes.

Determine the extent to which the board, commission, or agency has encouraged interested persons to report to it concerning the effect of its regulations and decisions on the effectiveness of service, economy of service, and availability of service that it has provided.

The council provided public notices to all but one of their meetings. However, public comment periods occurred during all of the meetings. The council has conscientiously made efforts to conduct at least one of their four meetings in a remote location such as Bethel, Kotzebue, and Sitka. They have held three town hall meetings, usually following one of their regularly scheduled meetings. Additionally, the public has the opportunity to contact the council, through its website, to offer feedback and request information.

Determine the extent to which the board, commission, or agency has encouraged public participation in the making of its regulations and decisions.

Under AS 44.29.350, the council has developed and implemented a statewide suicide prevention plan. The existing plan is currently under major revision to increase its usability. The council has requested input from participants outside the council such as the grantees, gatekeepers,¹⁴ and members of other boards. Once the plan has been approved by the council, it will be sent out for public testimony. Further revisions, as a result of public testimony, may be made before its release.

Determine the efficiency with which public inquiries or complaints regarding the activities of the board, commission, or agency filed with it, with the department to which a board or commission is administratively assigned, or with the office of victims' rights or the office of the ombudsman have been processed and resolved.

Neither the Office of the Ombudsman nor the Office of Victim's Rights reported any complaints filed with them regarding SSPC.

Determine the extent to which a board or commission that regulates entry into an occupation or profession has presented qualified applicants to serve the public.

This criterion is not applicable since SSPC does not regulate any occupations or professions.

Determine the extent to which state personnel practices, including affirmative action requirements, have been complied with by the board, commission, or agency to its own activities and the area of activity or interest.

Nothing in our review of the council indicated that there were any complaints involving SSPC personnel practices.

¹⁴ See footnote 12 for more information about gatekeepers.

Determine the extent to which statutory, regulatory, budgeting, or other changes are necessary to enable the agency, board, or commission to better serve the interests of the public and to comply with the factors enumerated in this subsection.

As discussed in Report Conclusions, we recommend the council be continued. However, in Recommendation No. 1, we also suggest that the appointment of the council's coordinator be approved by the council and annual performance reviews of the coordinator's performance should be conducted as set out in statute. This is important for SSPC to maintain its autonomy in the future for advising the legislature and governor. Due to personnel resource concerns and the desire for closer alignment between the council and DBH, DHSS has organizationally moved the administration of the council to DBH, specifically the Prevention and Early Intervention section. It is essential that DHSS and the council develop means to assure the council maintains an independent voice.

As discussed in Recommendation No. 2, the council should ensure that appointed members meet the qualifications of AS 44.29.300. We suggest the legislature consider broadening the qualifications for membership to ensure sufficient qualified and interested individuals are available and willing to serve on the council.

Determine the extent to which the board, commission, or agency has effectively attained its objectives and purposes and the efficiency with which the board, commission, or agency has operated.

The council established performance measures which are detailed in the annual reports to the legislature. For the FY 08 annual report, the measures were:

- Reduction of the three-year average rate of Alaska suicides.

SSPC has been unable to achieve this objective at this time. During FY 08, the council has partnered with DHSS, DBH in an initiative, attempting to accomplish this by FY 13.

- Review and update the statewide suicide prevention plan.

SSPC members are currently reviewing the plan with the objective of making it more relevant to the granting process for the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Prevention and Early Intervention Services grants.

- Consistently review data to identify trends, make analyses, and provide recommendations regarding suicide prevention, education and services needed in the State.

The Follow-Back Study, which presented Alaska suicide data and analysis for the period from September 1, 2003 through August 31, 2006, was received by SSPC in February 2007. The council has and continues to use this study to make recommendations to the legislature, executive branch agencies, and the public.

- Support and assist Alaskans in starting a state Suicide Prevention Awareness Network (Network).

The council supported the Alaska Suicide Prevention Action Coalition (ASPAC) in its research into becoming a Network affiliate. Although the Coalition decided to incorporate and maintain its autonomy, its goals are similar to the Network and further the goals of the council.

- Increase the number of communities that can recognize the warning signs of suicide through increasing the number of community-based suicide prevention grantees who align their community funding with the statewide suicide prevention plan.

The Prevention and Early Intervention section gave comprehensive prevention grants to communities for the FY 06 - FY 08 three-year grant cycle. A comprehensive prevention grant can be used to address any alcohol, drug, mental health, or suicide related issue. Since none of the grants during this grant cycle were specifically for suicide prevention, no tracking was done to determine whether grantees aligned their funding with the statewide plan. As comprehensive prevention grants continue to be made by DBH, the council should revise this performance measure.

Determine the extent to which the board, commission, or agency duplicates the activities of another governmental agency or the private sector.

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council mission overlaps with other state entities such as the Alaska Mental Health Board, the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority. However, the council was established to bring attention and focus, specifically, to the suicide issue in Alaska, so overlapping missions are to be expected.

While the council actively collaborates with various other boards and commissions with related missions, there does not appear to be any duplication of activities between the council and these other governmental agencies or in the private sector.

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STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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December 1, 2008

Pat Davidson
Legislative Auditor
Alaska State Legislature, Division of Legislative Audit
PO Box 113300
Juneau, AK 99811-3300

RECEIVED
DEC 01 2008
LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

Dear Ms. Davidson:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide a written response to the *Preliminary Audit Report on the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, Sunset Review, November 4, 2008*. I have reviewed the report and offer the following comments.

First, we appreciate your staff's careful attention to detail and the thorough nature of the audit process, including the many interviews and opportunities for individuals to be heard and to voice their opinions. Suicide is a critical social issue for the State of Alaska and the Statewide Suicide prevention Council (SSPC) has a significant responsibility to find strategies and solutions to begin reducing the rate of suicide throughout our state.

As stated in the audit report, the SSPC has recently undergone a significant change in location within the department and in their staff coordination. Beginning July 1, 2008, the SSPC is now under the direction of the Division of Behavioral Health, section of Prevention & Early Intervention Services. The reason for this change of location was to allow for better coordination of statewide suicide prevention efforts between the SSPC and Behavioral Health and to promote a more seamless and coordinated approach to suicide prevention in Alaska. While this transition is complete, the SSPC members and Behavioral Health staff are continuing to define and develop their relationship and structure. We are confident this change will accomplish its intended purpose and provide for better statewide alignment in issues related to suicide prevention.

The Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) supports and agrees with the audit findings and recommendations. We are pleased with the recommendation to extend the SSPC for four more years, with a new sunset date of June 30, 2013. We believe the DHSS and the SSPC are at a critical juncture to make significant progress in reducing and preventing suicide in Alaska. DHSS, in partnership with the council and others, recently received a 3-year federal Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention grant to focus on developing regional strategies to 'turn the corner' on suicide data. In addition, with one-time funding from the FY08 Legislature, we are offering regional suicide prevention planning grants focusing on those regions of Alaska with the highest rates of suicide. It is our intent that these planning grants will become the foundation of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Initiative, a joint effort of the DHSS and the Council. The four (4) year extension will allow these projects to become embedded in our statewide strategy and to develop sustainability of community/regional efforts.

In response to the other two recommendations, again we are in agreement with the findings and recommendation, with the following comments and suggestions.

Recommendation No. 1:

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council should, in accordance with statutes, appoint its own coordinator and perform annual performance reviews.

With the change in location of the SSPC to the Division of Behavioral Health, and the departure of Kathryn Craft as Coordinator, interim decisions were made with minimal input from the council. One decision was to have two current Behavioral Health staff share the role of providing support to the council. L. Diane Casto, Section Manager and James Gallanos, Project Coordinator, are currently sharing the task of providing staff support to the council. It was never the intent that these two staff would be the Council Coordinator, but would be available to provide support and guidance as requested from Council Chairperson Brenda Moore.

Due to limited funding, there are not enough funds for a full-time coordinator, and in fact, Ms. Craft provided approximately .25 FTE services to the council. At the most recent SSPC meeting in September, and again during a November telephonic executive work session of the council, it was decided that the personnel money available in the SSPC budget will be used to hire a .50 FTE Project Assistant, hired by the council, to provide day-to-day support. We are beginning the process to reclass the current Position Control Number (PCN) previously assigned to Ms. Craft. Once completed, we will begin the solicitation and hiring process, with input and direction from the council. The position will be located in the Juneau offices of the Division of Behavioral Health.

We also support the audit recommendation for the council to conduct annual evaluations of the council staff person and will provide assistance as requested.

Recommendation No. 2:

The legislature should consider modifying the composition of council membership.

As stated in the audit, there have been "excessive vacancies on the council and significant absences by council members at its meetings. "In addition, it is noted that "those being appointed to the council did not always meet the statutory qualifications for the position." We agree with both of these conclusions and support the recommendation to consider modifying the composition of the council membership.

In July, when the SSPC came into the Division of Behavioral Health, section of Prevention & Early Intervention Services, Ms. Casto began a dialogue with the Director of Boards and Commissions about the current vacancies and how best to recruit and/or encourage applications to fill these positions. Through this process, it became evident that the current membership did not directly meet the statutory qualifications for council membership. Discussions with the office of Boards and Commissions continue with DBH staff to make sure vacant positions are

Pat Davidson
Alaska State Legislature, Division of Legislative Audit
December 1, 2008
Page 3

filled in a timely manner and that applicants meet the statutory requirements. The office of Boards and Commissions is currently reviewing a number of applications for SSPC membership.

In addition, at the September meeting of the SSPC, there was a discussion about these current qualifications or categories of representation, and the council agrees that some modifying of the council composition would be beneficial. Providing more flexibility and broader definitions (i.e. expanding a secondary school counselor to a school counselor or K-12 school personnel) would allow for a larger pool of potential candidates.

Another area that has concerned the council is the large number of legislators required as council members. While the council is not concerned with having legislative representation and in fact supports their membership, it is difficult for legislators to be available for meetings, creating difficulty having a quorum for conducting council business. As reported in the audit, legislative members have attended meeting 15% of the time over the last 4 years.

With the challenges the current statutory qualifications have created, the DHSS supports the recommendation to modify the membership and, upon request, will work with the council to develop broader and more flexible categories of representation for possible legislative action.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the preliminary audit report. We support the work of the Legislative Audit team, and believe your recommendations will strengthen the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, the collaboration with Behavioral Health, and the council outcomes.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,



William H. Hogan
Commissioner

cc: Melissa Stone, Director, Division of Behavioral Health

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To: Legislative Budget and Audit Committee
Division of Legislative Audit

From: Statewide Suicide Prevention Council
Brenda Moore, Chair

Re: Department of Health and Social Services
Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, Sunset Review, November 4, 2008

RECEIVED
NOV 30 2008
LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

November 28, 2008

Recommendation No. 1

The Statewide Suicide Prevention Council (SSPC or council) should, in accordance with statutes appoint its own coordinator and perform annual performance reviews.

During an executive session, Nov. 24, 2008, the council discussed hiring a part-time coordinator to work in conjunction with the Division of Behavioral Health, Office of Prevention and Early Intervention manager and prevention specialist that currently provides administrative support to the council. There was consensus among council members that it could develop its own goals and implementation plans with input and assistance from its current administrative support staff. A coordinator is needed to organize and carry out operational activities necessary to support the council in achieving its goals. The council determined to form a committee to review the budget and job classification in order to hire a coordinator. A performance review schedule and procedure will also be established.

Recommendation No. 2

The legislature should consider modifying the composition of council membership.

The council is in agreement with the recommendation to broaden the qualifications of council members to ensure that appointees are interested in the work of the council and can make the time commitment necessary to serve. In addition the council agrees to the recommendation that consideration should be made to making legislative members non-voting to prevent potential quorum issues.