

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Alaska Commission on Aging

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March 28, 2009

The Honorable Lyman Hoffman, Co-Chair
The Honorable Bert Stedman, Co-Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Alaska State Capitol, Rooms 518 and 516
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Support for CSSB 35

Dear Chair Hoffman and Chair Stedman:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) encourages support of CSSB 35, a bill to extend the sunset date of the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council authored by Senator Davis and co-sponsored by Senators Ellis and Therriault. The mission of the Suicide Prevention Council is to advise the Governor and Legislature on issues relating to suicide and to promote public understanding of this huge public health concern in our state.

Alaska has the highest overall suicide rate in the nation. According to the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics, suicide was the fifth leading cause of death for all ages. The suicide rate for Alaska was 23.4 per 100,000 population which is more than double the U.S. rate of 11 per 100,000.

Suicide affects all Alaskans across the life span and cuts across economic, social, and ethnic boundaries. Alaska Native males in their twenties are at greatest risk. Older Alaskans have suicide rates at least one-third higher than the national average for their age groups. Suicide attempts are the third-highest cause of nonfatal hospitalized injuries for Alaskans among both 55 to 64- year old persons and those aged 65 and older.

ACoA respectfully requests your support for CSSB 35. Suicide devastates families and communities. Research has shown that there are a number of factors linked with decreasing the risk for suicide to prevent this avoidable loss of life. We believe that the Suicide Prevention Council should be allowed to continue its work building community supports and enhancing public awareness of the risk factors and warning signs of suicide to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director (465-4879), should you have any questions regarding our position. Thank you for your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Sharon Howerton-Clark
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

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