

Dear Honorable Committee Members

We are writing in support of HB 138 and HB 188.

Currently, Alaska's behavioral health crisis services rely heavily on dwindling general fund dollars, temporary grant funding, and insufficient Medicaid reimbursement rates. At the same time Alaska continues to face a behavioral health crisis. Our students have been vocal about their need for more behavioral support services. HB 138 offers a solution for funding by creating a small surcharge on wireless telephone lines to help fund a behavioral health crisis fund, similar to the fund for 911. This money could help support the 988 crisis hotline, mobile crisis teams, crisis stabilization centers, and culturally appropriate outreach, programs, and services. With the growing struggles related to mental health in our youth, these services are increasingly necessary and need a guaranteed source of revenue which HB 138 would provide.

Our school district has struggled with teacher retention issues. In recent years, we have relied on H-1B and J-1 visa holders, largely from the Philippines, to help educate our students. We currently have ____ personnel working under some form of visa. Recent proposed changes in federal law raise concerns about the visa process and may make it more difficult to utilize. HB 188 establishes a Welcoming Alaska Office in the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to support "New Alaskans." This office would also support the retention and recruitment of H-1B and J-1 visa holders, assisting school districts and visa holders in the process. HB 188 could provide vital assistance to our districts.

The Northwest Arctic Borough School District supports both HB 138 and HB 188. Please call with any questions or concerns.